OUR HERITAGE

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by

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FOR

MAULANA ABUL KALAM AZAD

AND

PANDIT JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

SYMBOLS OF SYNTHESIS, UNITY AND GROWTH.

PREFACE

An invitation to deliver the Maharaja Sayaji Rao Golden Jubilee Lectures for 1943 served as an incentive to organise and record some thoughts on the unity and continuity of Indian culture. The first two chapters of this book are substantially the same as the lectures delivered and soon after published under that foundation. I wish to place on record my gratefulness for the honour conferred by Baroda's invitation and the opportunity it offered to stress some aspects of Indian civilisation which are often neglected in our traditional histories.

India is too big a country to be summed up in any simple formula. Her long and chequered history lends itself to diverse and at times contrary interpretations. Complexity and variety are inevitable in so vast and ancient a land and those who seek to stress and perpetuate differences may find sufficient material to justify their stand point. And yet there is a unity of spirit underlying the multiform manifestations of Indian life.

To the world outside, India is often represented as a stage for the conflict between Hindus and Muslims, and the pomp and pageantry of prince and princeling. They form but a small part of the story recorded here. The omission is not accidental but deliberate. Considering the expanse of the country and the duration of her history, the

vastness of the population and the stringency of their struggle for existence, communal frictions are few and far between while prince and princeling seem but mere bubbles on the surface of Indian life. The record of communal jealousy and clash pales into insignificance when one thinks of the friendship and kindliness that generally mark the relations of the communities. The pomp and pageantry of the princes fade into nothingness against the background of the silent and massive flow of the dumb and inert masses. In the long run, they and their life alone matter.

The contemporary world is torn with the clash of rival ideas and ideologies. Immediate differences often conceal fundamental needs and ideals. India sought to reconcile differences without suppressing individual points of views. She built up a unity of spirit which has survived without the aid of physical compulsion. We can serve India and humanity best if we seek to discover that unity and base on it our attempts to create a new India out of old values and traditions.

HUMAYUN KABIR

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THE ARYAN SYNTHESIS

FROM immemorial times, India has been the meeting place of conflicting races and civilisations. From immemorial times, she has tried to achieve a unity for the heterogeneous elements which make up the totality of her life. Hers is perhaps the oldest civilisation with an uninterrupted history. Most of her contemporaries have ceased to exist. She has not only survived but maintained and developed a continuous culture. Different races have met and fought and fraternised on her soil. She has absorbed all of them into her blood. Conflicting cultures have struggled for supremacy here. She has ground and modelled them into her own likeness. Foreign races and foreign truths have alike been grist to her mill. Their struggles have ended in new synthesis that marked new levels of achievement for the human spirit. She has lived through recurrent centuries of war and pestilence. She has triumphed over natural calamities and human misrule. Whence this vitality that overcomes destruction and death? Whence this wisdom that reconciles opposing truths? The story of India's culture unravels the secret of that vitality and that wisdom. It is a story of unity and synthesis, of reconciliation and development, of a perfect fusion of old traditions and new values.

1

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

TILL recently the Aryans were regarded as the earliest invaders of the land. It was thought that they came to a country which was uncivilised and barbarian, but modern research has pushed back the limits of Indian pre-history. There were invaders even before the Aryans poured into this land. They had evolved a civilisation higher than that of the Aryan hordes who came in their wake. These pre-Aryans had displaced still earlier peoples and built up a new civilisation which has astonished modern scholars by its extent and depth. The Aryan invasion repeated the process and led to fresh infusion of the old with the new. This continued with the successive inroads of fighting races who came to conquer but remained to lose themselves in the Indian racial cauldron. The Greek invaders were followed by Sakas and Huns and a hundred other nameless tribes. They all appeared on the scene as victors but were soon absorbed in the ranks of the vanquished.

Each fresh incursion of race or idea found the Indian temperament more malleable than before and accelerated the process of assimilation and synthesis. At its worst the process led to a mechanical juxtaposition. At its best it brought to birth a new and organic way of life. The

seething cauldron never cooled, for new ingredients were continually added and in turn added to the richness and complexity of Indian life. Some acute student of sociology may some day link the upheavals in Indian social forms and Indian modes of religion with the incursion of some fresh batch of invaders from outside but as yet the story remains incomplete and merely hypothetical. This much alone can be said. To-day whatever is Indian, whether it be an idea, a word, a form of art, a political institution or a social custom is a blend of many different strains and elements.

In spite of this derivation from many sources and the consequent variety of forms and types, we find a remarkable unity of spirit informing Indian culture throughout the ages. In fact it is this underlying unity which is one of the most remarkable features of Indian culture. In volume and duration no civilisation with the possible exception of the Chinese can bear comparison with the civilisation of India. The area of the land, the number of the people, the variety of the races and the length of history are hardly repeated elsewhere. The vitality of Indian culture is equally amazing. In spite of a thousand vicissitudes, it has survived to the modern day. It has not only survived, but displays an energy which promises to make it one of the most fruitful sources of the future culture of the world. This has been possible only on account of a sense of

Indianness which imposed unity on all diversity and wove into one fabric of national life the many strands of different texture, colour and quality which have entered here.

Unity and uniformity serve as the basis of the continuity of the Indian tradition. The ancient world threw up fine flowers of civilisation in many lands. With the exception of India and China they are all dead and gone. New civilisations may have blossomed in such ancient lands, but they are novel growths. It is only in India and to some extent in China that the old civilisation and culture have grown and changed, but never grown or changed at the expense of an underlying unity. This has been possible only through the capacity of re-adjustment exhibited by Indian society. Capacity of re-adjustment is the index of life, and the secret of the long and continuous life of Indian civilisation lies in the fact that Indian thought and Indian social polity have adjusted and re-adjusted themselves to the changing circumstances of different periods with an elasticity that has rarely been equalled.

One ground of this adjustment is found in the spirit of toleration that has characterised Indian history throughout the ages. 'Live and let live' has been the policy of the Indian in all spheres of life. Sometimes this has been carried so far that contrary if not contradictory attitudes have been allowed to survive simultaneously. Toleration has led to the sufferance of evil and even to

indifference to the values of life. This, however, is at worst the defect of a virtue. Such toleration is perhaps preferable to the fanatic devotion which leads to the denial and persecution of all other values but its own.

Throughout the changes of Indian history, we therefore find a spirit of underlying unity which informs the diverse expressions of its life. But the unity was never a dead uniformity. A living unity never is. Universality carries with it the demand for variety and particularity. Whatever is universal cannot be exhausted in any one particular form. This is so in the case of even abstract truth. The same truth reveals itself differently in different contexts. To deny this is to deny the possibility of communication. In the realm of empirical fact, the same event is experienced and expressed differently by different persons. In the case of concrete reality this is still more the case. Whatever seeks to be universal can have only a categorical form. The content must differ with different people in different ages and different climes. The unity of Indian culture has been based on a real universality. Differences and divergences have never been alien to it. On the contrary, it has dominated and unified all manifestations of outward difference.

Unity and universality must belong to any culture that is true and vital. In a sense, unity and universality must belong to culture as such.

Culture is a concept which cannot be simply or unitarily defined. There is no single character or mark which can be regarded as the essence or differentia of culture. It is always a complex of many strands of varying importance and vitality. If we attempt to differentiate between culture and civilisation, we might say that civilisation is the organisation of life which makes civil society possible. Such civil society is the condition for corporate life in which alone individuals can pursue fruitful and creative activity. Culture on the other hand is the resultant of such organisation and expresses itself through language and art, through philosophy and religion, through social habits and customs and through political institutions and economic organisations. Not one of them is separately culture but collectively they constitute the expression of life which we describe as culture. Civilisation is the organisation of society which creates the conditions of culture. There can, therefore, be no culture without civilisation, but there may be civilisations which have not yet developed their culture. Perhaps what is more often the case is that there are civilised peoples among whom only a small section have achieved culture. We have therefore had and still have races and nations that are civilised. But we have not yet had any nation or race that could be regarded as cultured in all its sections and classes. Culture is the efflorescence of civilisation.

It was inevitable that without control over the forces of nature, the extent of culture should be considerably less than that of civilisation. Man's limited power and resources compelled association, as without association man's survival would itself be in jeopardy. Association secured the conditions of survival, and once survival was guaranteed, released sufficient energies for the development of culture on a rudimentary scale. Culture was, therefore, the result of liberation from the urgency of the problem of existence while civilisation was the form or machinery evolved for the achievement of such liberty. It is, therefore, not surprising that culture should be less pervasive and widespread than the machinery of civilisation. What is surprising is that India should seem to offer an example where culture is almost as extensive as civilisation itself.

The experience of European countries gives us cases of civilisation without culture. In fact, one of the most serious problems of modern times is to create a culture for nations which have achieved high success in evolving the organisation and instruments of civilisation. In India, on the other hand, the processes of civilisation have not been so highly developed as in Europe, but the stage of civilisation evolved has expressed itself in the pervasive character of culture which extends through the vast majority of her people. Even the casual tourist has observed that in India the difference between the masses and the classes is not one of quality and can be explained in terms

of information and opportunity. It is otherwise in Europe. There the difference in quality between the masses and the classes is so great that it has at times shaken the faith in democracy of the most fervent of democrats. The developments in technocracy have not changed this state of affairs, but on the contrary tended to develop human morons. In India, even the backwardness in development and application of scientific technique has not reduced the innate skill and intelligence of the village artisan and craftsman.

This remarkable phenomenon can be explained only in terms of the unity and continuity of Indian culture. Unity, we have seen, is in one sense, the common characteristic of all culture. What specially distinguishes the culture of India is its unbroken continuity. Here, there have been no violent or sudden breaks but on the contrary a steady growth and expansion of culture which has gradually permeated every class and section of society. The length of her history is no doubt one of the most important of the contributing factors but her long history would not have sufficed unless the spirit of toleration had made possible the unity and continuity of her traditions.

2
GEOGRAPHICAL INFLUENCES

BOTH directly as well as indirectly, India's geography has been largely responsible for her spirit of toleration. Directly, the influence of geography has operated through the vastness of the land as well as its climate. The vastness of the land influenced the mind in two ways. The great variety in landscape, climate and conditions of life prepared in the mind a readiness to accept difference. Besides, the vast spaces offered room for slow infiltration by new-comers and allowed each locality unhampered scope of development along its own lines. On the whole, Indian climate makes for lassitude and passivity, especially when one compares the easier conditions of life to the rigours of the central Asiatic steppes from which most of the Indian invaders came. The tempo of change was thus slowed down. The very processes of history unfolded in leisured dignity. Geography of the country explains the peculiar features of Indian history, while the combined effects of geography and history show themselves in the realm of the spirit. Toleration and easy acceptance have therefore been characteristic of India. Clashes there have been on the material plane. On the plane of the spirit where culture flourishes, we find evidence only of synthesis.

Geography has been largely responsible for the sense of Indianness, for rarely has a country been

so clearly marked out to be a unity. India is shut off from the rest of Asia by the inaccessible barriers of the mighty Himalayas. Attendant mountain ranges extend like protecting arms right up to the seas. The ocean on all other sides makes her a compact territorial unit whose internal cohesion is matched by her sharp differentiation from all external lands. Not only are her territories thus sharply demarcated from the rest of the world, but nature has generously placed within her boundaries almost all the resources that man needs for developing a rich and creative life. Situated in one corner of Asia, she stood outside the direct course of the great movements of population that happened elsewhere. India combines difficulties of access from outside with vastness of the tracts available for habitation and culture within. Together, they made India more immune from foreign attack or interference than has been the case with most of the other countries whose civilisations flourished in ancient times. We often talk of the many invasions of India. Compared to the vicissitudes suffered by Iran, Mesopotamia, Syria or Egypt, she has enjoyed calm and tranquility, and developed her civilisation unhampered by interference from outside.

One might go so far as to say that Indian geography compelled unity of her history. Physical features so sharply mark off India from the rest of Asia that attempts either to divide the country or to expand it beyond its natural

frontiers have invariably failed. The Aryan invaders who came from outside soon lost their connections with the Aryans in the trans-Indian lands. Attempts of the Aryans to keep Afghanistan within India also failed. Notwithstanding the survival of names like Kandahar, Afghanistan soon moved out of the orbit of Indian life. Greek attempts to incorporate the Punjab into Afghanistan failed equally with the Maurya attempt to retain Kandahar. The attempts of Mahmud Gazni to rule India from Kabul failed while the Pathan emperors soon lost control over the trans-border lands. The Mogul empire exhibits a repetition of the same story. Similarly, Sind has often been annexed to, but could not be incorporated permanently in Persia.

This clear demarcation from the outside world is matched by an equally insistent movement for unity within India. From the earliest times, we find kingdoms and principalities seeking to impose one common rule over the whole country. The legendary stories of Ramayana and Mahabharat tell a story of unification. The first historic figure of whom we have any record is Chandragupta who sought to bring the whole country under one rule. Asoka continued the tradition and in fact brought more of India under one common rule than has been the case either before or after. Monarchs who followed continued the tradition. During the empire of the Pathans and the Moguls, we find the same story repeated time after time. Sharp differentiation from the world outside and

a unified government within have been the goal of Indian polity, from the days of pre-history to the modern day. The whole course of recorded history witnesses to the unbreakable unity which geography has inexorably imposed upon India.

The geographic unity of the country has had its effects on the economic life of the people. One geography has resulted in one economy. Here also the size of the country and its fertility helped in unification. The size of the country and the quality of the land permitted slow extension of the people and gradual expansion of cultivation. Smaller size would have compelled intensification in cultivation. Marked differences in quality of land would have forced uneven development in different areas. Either of the contingencies would have led to continuous experiments with the methods of production and the emergence of new types of economic society. There is little doubt that the forms of production and the relation of the different classes to the productive forces have a deep influence upon the forms of society. The fact that India has continually developed and maintained an agricultural economy for almost four or five thousand years explains in part the depth and tenacity of her culture and traditions. The very length of time has helped to create a common mentality. The tendency has been further strengthened by the unity of economic organisations throughout the land.

It is common experience that people of the same avocation develop a similar mentality. The fact

that Indian economy has been primarily agricultural led to the development of common characteristics and a common outlook. Agricultural communities the world over are inclined to be tribal and parochial. The unit of life is the village community. Social co-operation is restricted to the members of the village group. Such conditions preclude on the one hand the development of an individualistic outlook and on the other the growth of a social consciousness that transcends the limits of the family or the tribal unit. In India we have always found deep loyalty to the family or the clan, but evidence of equal loyalty to the nation or the country is rarely to be found. In fact the restriction of economic life to the village community prevented the growth of the consciousness of nationhood.

The predominantly agricultural bias of Indian economy has influenced national character in another way. The peasant, specially before the achievement of partial control over the forces of nature, was largely dependent for prosperity on factors over which he had no control. He could control neither drought nor excess of rain. Yet these were the conditions which were determinant factors in his economic life. Is it surprising that the peasant should therefore the world over exhibit an attitude of fatalism and fortitude before the buffets of fate? Commerce and industry on the other hand demand more of the individual and tend to make him self-reliant, aggressive and adventurous. A society whose economy

is primarily commercial or industrial therefore develops in its members greater resilience, vivacity and individual initiative.

Indian political vicissitudes have therefore been largely conditioned by the inadequacy of her scientific equipment to her geography. While her geography demanded unification of the country into one state, the prevalent state of control over the forces of nature rendered this difficult to achieve and almost impossible to maintain. There has therefore till recently been unity of culture without unity of administration.

With increasing scientific advancement and consequent condensation of space and time, conditions of political unity have also now been assured. A unified culture with a unified state in the back-ground of India's vast potential resources can well make India the leader of the world in all fields of human activity.

Even the darkest clouds have a silver lining. The political vicissitudes of India have also had redeeming features. An attitude of toleration has fostered simultaneous development of different strands. As we have already indicated, this forms one of the most significant characteristics of Indian culture. Political vicissitudes have contributed to the growth of many sidedness of life. The waves of foreign races and tribes who poured into India from the earliest times led to constant changes in the structure and distribution of political power. The break up of the country

into many principalities of different importance was another immediate consequence. The existence of many kingdoms and the constant shift in their power made people less aggressive and intolerant. It also induced in the people an attitude of toleration and acceptance of the foreigner.

In spite of many invasions and dynastic changes, the life of the people flowed in one continuous process of gradual change. The civilisation of Mahenjodaro was not destroyed but taken up by the Aryans who built their culture on its basis. This continuity is so marked that there have been scholars who doubt whether Mahenjodaro represents a pre-Aryan culture at all. They believe that India was the original home of the Aryans and Mahenjodaro marks only an early stage in the development of Aryan culture. We need not enter here into the question of racial affinity. It is undeniable that traces of Mahenjodaro have been found in successive stages of Indian life and culture. Siva and Sakti cults in modern Hinduism have been traced to the traditions of Mahenjodaro. Seals have been found there which supply the originals of the statues of the seated Buddha.

Political clashes brought into juxtaposition different tribes and in fact different stages of culture. The early Indians were thus forced to recognise that man's knowledge and understanding of reality is not static but dynamic. It does

not stand constant but continually evolves. There is a bewildering variety of Indian religious forms. They exhibit almost every stage of spiritual development from the open fetishism of the masses to the rigid and uncompromising monotheism of the Vedantist. The incorporation of a multitude of different tribal creeds at all stages of development into the body of Hindu religious thought can alone explain this strange multiplicity.

Geography of the country demanded political unification. The stage of scientific knowledge did not permit the fulfilment of that tendency. We therefore have constant efforts at building of unitary empires. The material conditions explain why such empires did not continue long. The early empires and attempts at colonisation are today remembered but dimly. History has little record of them but legends and tradition linger in the memory of the race and even today work as a cementing factor. So great was the sense of unity that few foreigners could resist its force. Few people remember today that Rajputs were in fact foreign intruders who came fairly late. Their foreign origin is forgotten. Not only have they been incorporated into Hindu society but have sometime been regarded as the special champions and depositories of ancient Indian culture. We shall discuss the advent of the Moslems more fully at a later stage but even they were absorbed in the stream of Indian life. It is only the Europeans who have resisted the

tendency towards Indianisation and retained their separate identity intact. In consequence they have never been accepted by the land or the people, and in spite of many points of contact remain mere birds of passage.

3

SOCIO-POLITICAL INTERACTIONS

WE have already seen that the urge for unification in ancient India could not achieve political unity on a permanent basis. We have also seen that the urge for unity expressed itself in terms of civilisation and culture. One expression of this cultural unity is to be found in the political institutions which were then developed and persist to modern times. One fact has often attracted notice. In spite of the many changes in kings and kingdoms, the organised social life of the community has hardly changed in the last two or three thousand years. The village republics which were established in India in early times are in one sense extant to this day.

The communities described in the Vedas and Upanishads were popular and democratic. The will of the people found expression in elected assemblies and democratically governed institutions. There are also references to elected kings and to the power of banishing kings or recalling banished kings. With the rise and consolidation

of empires, the power of the popular assemblies was curtailed. The survival of Panchayats and their exercise of wide if undefined powers prove that the democratic tradition has never wholly died.

In the earliest period, each group of villages had its samity or elected assembly. It conceded the right of free expression and open discussion to all its members and decided the not only political but social and religious questions as well. The Buddhist monasteries were also democratic orders. There is evidence to suggest that even the establishment of the Maurya empire did not destroy these republics. Asoka's empire was perhaps a loose federation rather than an empire in the commonly accepted sense of the word. This would also explain its magnitude. We have reasons to believe that under Bindusara the empire did not extend beyond what is modern Hyderabad. The only country Asoka forcibly conquered was Kalinga or Orissa. Asoka's empire however extended over almost the whole of India. This enlargement may be explained by the voluntary adhesion of the smaller republics south of Hyderabad to the loose federal empire of Asoka.

The village republic was the natural unit for an agricultural economy. The fact that India is to this day predominantly agricultural explains why inspite of the rise and fall of dynasties, she has kept her tradition of village autonomy almost intact. Agricultural communities can be self-

contained and represent perhaps the only instances of autarky in actual operation. The village communities of India were therefore independent and have retained to this day a large degree of their independence. Village autonomy constitutes in fact the one continuing and stable feature of the social life of India.

Though Indian economy has remained dominantly agricultural, it could not remain solely agricultural for long. Soon trade and commerce developed and led to a division of labour which finally ossified into the institution of caste. The growth of trade and commerce brought with it a necessary expansion in the unit of economic life. The incorporation of village republics into kingdoms and empires was only the political expression of this change. With the increase in the size of the political unit, the functions of government became more and more complex. This led to increasing centralisation in the interest of uniformity and better administration. The distinction between local and central government increased. Many of the powers and duties of administration passed out of the control of the village communes. Nevertheless, agriculture remained dominant industry of the country and to this day the tradition of village self-rule has persisted. To this day the village Panchayat is not only the local executive and judiciary but also exercises considerable legislative powers with or without the sanction of the State. In fact, the Panchayats exercise control over the social and

religious life of the community in a way which the State can never emulate. This holds not only in southern India with its predominantly Hindu population but also in northern India and in areas where the Moslems predominate.

The continuity in the economic and political life of the Indian village community has had its effect on social habits as well. Here the results have been on the whole undesirable. Rigidity of the economic forms has not only prevented the growth of wealth but also made for a rigidity of temper which resists reform and innovation. It is not surprising that peasant communities the world over have been characterised by a conservative and narrow outlook. Trade and commerce not only make for quick turnover of material goods, they also lead to circulation of ideas and a readiness for accepting novelty and change. In India, agricultural economy and village communes have combined to make the average villager conservative and inert. They have also tended to break the sense of national solidarity and weaken the capacity for united political action. We find in India the strange paradox that in spite of a strong consciousness of cultural unity, the people have always lacked in the instinct of unified national political action.

The strength and the weakness of Indian culture in its social aspects can be best studied in the institution of caste. The criticisms against caste are obvious. It has broken up the unity of

Indian life. It has prevented the growth of democracy. Among the higher castes, it has engendered snobbishness and pride. Among the lower castes it has induced a spirit of inferiority and servility. Among all sections of the people, it has hindered the development of a common humanity. In spite of these and other valid criticisms against caste, it must nevertheless be conceded that the institution owed its origin to a spirit of toleration and continuity.

To regard the institution of caste as an expression of toleration might at first sight seem paradoxical. The paradox disappears when we remember that India has been the arena where races appeared as conquerors and were in turn conquered by a succeeding invader. In such a context of diverse heterogeneity of blood, colour and language, of custom and belief, the achievement of a single social and political entity seemed almost impossible. The European colonisers in the 18th and 19th centuries were faced with similar problems in America, Australia and Africa. The contrast between the European and the indigenous population was great, but it was no greater than that which faced the Aryan invaders of India. In fact the problem of adjustment was more complex in India. The Europeans faced local tribes as a fairly homogeneous group. These tribes also represented a more or less homogeneous stage of development. In India, the tribes and races which faced one another were not only many but they represented the widest possible variety in

the level of civilisation and culture. The European colonisers had to resolve the clash of duality. The Aryan settlers were confronted with resolution of multiplicity into a working unity.

The European solved the problem of racial diversity by exterminating the indigenous populations in America and Australia or enslaving them in Africa. The Aryan settlers found the answer in the institution of caste. Judged by the standard of abstract justice, there is no defence for a system which condemns to perpetual inferiority millions of human beings for no crime other than the accident of their birth. From the standpoint of actual history, there are however points in favour of a system which sought to integrate many different races into one social whole and find room for different stages of civilisation within one cultural unity.

In origin and intention, if not in actual operation, the institution of caste was therefore a device for enabling different races and individuals to live together in harmony. This device worked only through its elasticity which reconciled men to the institution. Originally caste was based on function and not heredity. Individuals as well as families could pass from caste to caste. The fact that along with the inclusion of Dravidian gods in the Aryan pantheon, Dravidian priests were accepted as Brahmins is evidence of the fluidity of the system. This possibility of movement from caste to caste developed a sense of solidarity and

helped to minimise the enmity between the Aryan and the Dravidian. Caste also helped to mitigate the economic conflicts which are at the root of the most of the ills of modern Europe. The predominantly agricultural economy of the country was one reason why such class conflicts never came to a head in ancient India. The absence of control over the forces of nature was another. But perhaps the chief cause is to be found in the original flexibility of the institution of caste. Men are often content to suffer present evil for the hope of future gain and the institution of caste held out such hopes both here and hereafter. With the disappearance of its elasticity, the institution of caste lost whatever justification it once possessed.

The unity and continuity of Indian culture is also manifested in her various languages. The differences of her languages are often exaggerated today and exaggerated for obvious political reasons. No exaggeration can however deny their fundamental unity of structure and outlook. It cannot be denied that they are derived from different sources, tribal, Dravidian and Aryan. Like the synthesis of caste, a synthesis of language has preserved many of them and allowed each of them freedom of development within one common outlook. Sanskrit, as the name itself suggests, is a language constructed out of some earlier form, but it has deeply influenced all other languages of India in vocabulary and structure.

This influence has gone so deep that scholars have at times been led to regard all Indian languages as variations from one common Sanskritic base. Even a language like Tamil, with a literature which was fairly developed before the advent of the Aryans on the Indian scene, has not escaped this influence. The Sanskritic tradition has not faded with the passage of time. New languages which came in the wake of new invaders, challenged its supremacy, but Sanskrit has held and perhaps deepened its influence. All Indian languages thus have a large common vocabulary and exhibit marked similarities in grammatical structure. Even more remarkable is the unity of temperament expressed in all of them. The earliest Tamil poetry is full of the hatred of the Dravidian for the Aryan invader. The early literature of the Aryans expresses their fear and hatred of the Dravidian and other pre-Aryans. The mood of conflict and hatred does not however persist for long. The spirit of accommodation which united the different races into one social system also expressed itself in the literatures of India and softened the antagonism of races and tribes.

4

THE KATHAK

THE Aryan conquest of north-eastern and southern India was primarily cultural, not physical. The fusion between the races soon be-

came so complete that the Dravidians forgot that they could claim a civilisation much older than that of the new invaders. On the side of the Aryans, the hatred and distrust for the culture of the Dravidians changed into a spirit of acceptance and assimilation. In the new composite culture, both the warring groups could find a meeting point as well as a symbol of unity. We no doubt find in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata suggestions and memories of the earlier conflict between the Dravidian and the Aryan but even in this conflict there is recognition that each of the parties had virtues which the other could accept to its own advantage. The Mahabharata even more than the Ramayana helped in this process of synthesis which was continued in the folklore of the Buddhist and other movements of reform.

It was the wandering minstrels belonging to different sects who were primarily responsible for giving the unity of outlook and temper which, in spite of local differences, characterises to this day the mentality of the Indian peasant from one corner of the country to the other. People have often wondered at the philosophic content and fortitude of Indian village folk. Sometimes it is hardly distinguishable from passivity and submissiveness. Low vitality often makes for fatalism and calm submission to fate, but there is probably a limit to people's power of self-deception and philosophising. The demands of life in India are few and they are easily satisfied, but even in the



Travellers or Pilgrims listening to a village Kathak

days when the Indian peasant did not suffer from lack of food, he was content to speculate upon the mysteries of fate. Climate may have something to do with it, but even when we have made allowances for all these factors, the rustic here has in some sense a philosophy of life, and can talk of fate and circumstances with a detachment and insight that surprises the unaccustomed foreigner. This quality of resignation and tolerance in his mental make-up is all the more surprising in view of the almost universal lack of literacy in India today. Whence comes this culture of the mind when even the culture of letters is denied to him?

This paradox resolves itself when one remembers the role of the village story-teller and the wandering teacher and mendicant who went about the countryside. It was their function to bring the teachings of religion and morality within the reach of the average villager. Their tales compensated to a large extent for their lack of a literary education. Philosophy was translated into myth and religion embodied in the actions of man. Morality came easily and naturally in the form of legends and village life was thus enriched by the incorporation of the wisdom of generations. The story-teller's art is almost a forgotten art in India today. We no longer meet the wandering minstrels who recounted tales of ancient valour and romance, and sang their way all over the land. The village kathak or story-teller has also disappeared and left behind him a void that is difficult to fill. For the minstrels and story-tellers

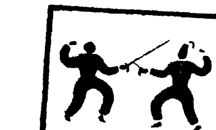
performed a most valuable function in the social economy of the village. They were the custodians of local tradition and kept the memory of deeds of heroism and sacrifice fresh in the people's mind. They were the reporters of notable happenings and gave to passing events the currency of legendary eternity.

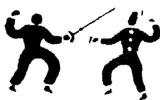
The story-teller was not only a historian and a poet; he was in himself the one-man precursor of the Indian theatre or Jatra. The modern stage and cinema were unknown. Even to this day they are a luxury beyond the dreams of the vast majority of villages. Most little towns possess a cinema of sorts, and village folk in spite of trade depression and the slump in prices, flock to see the apotheosis of luxury and futility upon the silver screen. Even religious passions are excited and satisfied in the modern cinema, but in the past it was all different. Before the days of the rude, make-shift Jatra, the story-teller was the sole comfort and solace of the villagers, for his art supplied to their imagination the pageants which remained unseen. His vivid words painted before their eyes visions of heroism and sacrifice, of conflict and disharmony, and the final consummation in which truth and virtue triumphed.

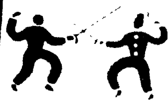
We are yet far from exhausting the functions which the story-teller performed, for it would be a mistake to think of him as a mere individual. He was an institution without which village life would lose its interest and point. Actively, he

Hindus v. Moslems.

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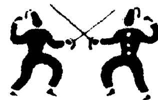
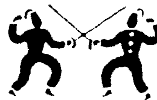
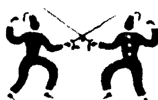



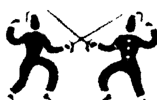
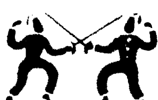


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Moslems v. Moslems.

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was many things in one, but he served also as the focus in which the social life of the village was concentrated and came to consciousness. Men gathered to hear his tales, but once they had gathered, they naturally talked, and talked about the things which interested them. The story-teller's *soiree* was therefore a social clearing house, where not only were ideas exchanged and issues discussed, but rude justice meted out to social delinquents. The club was unknown and unheard of, but the want was hardly felt so long as people could gather in the evenings and listen to the story-teller's tales.

The story-teller rarely, if ever, moved away from the level of village life. Even in the wildest flights of his imagination, he had to remember his audience, for their appreciation and comprehension was the condition of his success and livelihood. His tales of heroism and sacrifice lifted the hearts of the villagers, but they never soared beyond their familiar world of everyday. Homely allusions and local references were freely absorbed in his currency and gave to his recitals the semblance of reality.

We are too often inclined to think of religion in India in terms of asceticism and penance, of a lyric ecstasy of the mind in which the familiar landmarks of everyday experience are swept away. It is all this and yet this is not all. For we tend to forget the simple pieties of day to day, of the normal routine of devotions which are as much

a part of daily life as the physiological functionings of the body. The story-teller of old never made this mistake and his stories were woven round the religious experience and expectations of the people. His tales of heroism centred round the mythical figures of traditional faiths, and their records of service and sacrifice were used to point a moral or illustrate a homily.

5

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

THE Indian religions also tell the same story of unity and continuity. We have briefly referred to the fact that the bewildering variety of Indian religions is due to the incorporation of different rival creeds into Hindu religious thought. The earlier Aryans worshipped the forces of nature and personified them in their myths and hymns. Soon after their settlement in India we find the Vedic gods gradually displaced. Their place is taken by a trinity in whose composition the place of Brahma is gradually taken by Sakti or female energy. The Vedic literature contains no reference whatever to any female deity to which Sakti might even approximate, while the references to Vishnu and Siva are also of the slightest.

Siva with a trident has been traced back to Mahenjodaro while the phallic element in his

worship is also regarded as evidence of his non-Aryan origin. Scholars are generally of opinion that some pre-Aryan conception of Siva was superimposed upon that of the Vedic Rudra to determine the nature and worship of Siva in modern Hinduism. It has also been suggested that the story of the feast of Daksha from which Siva was excluded contains an allegorical reference to the late recognition of Siva. The conception of Vishnu as the dark god is also obviously non-Aryan and can be explained only in terms of the attempt of the conquering Aryans to win over the conquered peoples of the country by accommodating one of their principal gods in the Hindu pantheon. Sakti similarly has been regarded as the goddess of vegetation and was originally worshipped in spring. It was only gradually that she was accorded a place of honour in the scheme of Hindu gods.

The interesting point is that the Aryans in accepting the gods and goddesses of the Dravidians and other pre-Aryans modified both their forms and the ritual of their worship. This alteration did not however provoke any opposition and was accepted by all sections of the people. Such incorporation of the deities of rival races or nations into one pantheon is not confined to India. What is peculiar to India is the scale and degree of such incorporation. One reason for this was the attitude of toleration engendered by India's geography and history. This led to the recognition that though reality is one and unified, its manifestations must

be different to different persons in different stages of civilisation. Quite early in their history, the Aryans therefore held that every creed contains elements of truth, for it is the product of man's insight at different levels into the same truth about the same reality.

The unity of the religious outlook in India has thus been based upon a philosophic spirit which recognises the value of both form and spirit, of outward ritual and inner essence. The earliest Aryan religious experiences recorded in the Vedas pay little attention to form or ritual. Man's deepest yearnings were satisfied by a spiritual communion with the forces of nature regarded as manifestations of the Supreme Reality. It is generally held that though there was no caste system among the Aryan tribes at the time of their immigrations, a priesthood had soon been formed. By the time the Rigveda was composed, the priestly caste had already separated itself from the rest of the tribe. This necessarily led to the growth of ritual and the development of elaborate forms of worship and sacrifice. In time, the material aspects of ritual increased so much that people tended to forget the inner purpose of religion.

The fourfold division of the Vedas shows traces of this process of increasing elaboration. Religion degenerated as a result of the division of labour which unfortunately ossified into caste. It became for all practical purposes the sole concern of

a particular class which regarded it as a profession or means of livelihood. The need for religion can, however, no more than the need for food, be vicariously satisfied. Empty rituals and forms of worship provoke discontent in sensitive minds. We find that a series of reform movements began which culminated in the teachings of Buddha. As the materialistic ritualism had taken an extreme form, the reaction was also extreme. Buddha preached the total renunciation of ritualism and worship and laid his whole emphasis on morality and spiritual discipline.

The intensely intellectual approach of Buddhism was often beyond the range of the average man. Soon a new form of ritual grew up within Buddhism itself. This ritualism proved even more materialistic than the ritualism which Buddha had sought to banish. The Buddhist metaphysics of transience was misunderstood by many who argued that since all things are momentary, our acts and their results also must be momentary. Such an attitude undermines the basis of morality and encourages a tendency to regard the world as illusory. This explains the looseness in morals which soon pervaded Indian society. It also explains in part the ascetic and negative attitude of mind whose growth led to many of India's political vicissitudes. Other-worldliness and passivism is often regarded today as the characteristic Indian attitude towards reality. It must be remembered that this is a fairly late growth. The story of ancient India is one of material

prosperity and grandeur. The spirit of adventure which led to the building up of magnificent empires and the setting up of prosperous colonies across the seas is hard to reconcile with an ascetic and merely negative frame of mind.

There is other evidence as well of the recognition of both form and spirit, of outward ritual and inner essence in Indian religious experience and history. The conception of life as divided into four stages or ashramas is in one sense peculiarly Indian. It makes an attempt to combine materiality with spirituality, worldly success with spiritual excellence. Every man must go through the fourfold stages of initiation, house-holder's life, retirement and freedom from earthly bonds. No aspect of human desire or function is overlooked here. The excellence which is sought must be realised through individual as well as social activities. This is seen even in the conception of the values which every individual must seek. Man fulfils himself not by seeking the spirit alone, but by a realisation of the values of earthly and spiritual good. *Dharma, artha, kama,* and *moksha* are the goods which Indian thought postulates. This fourfold classification is itself evidence that the economic and political as well as the hedonistic elements of human character are equally recognised. A broad-based acceptance of all the demands of life gave Indian religious outlook its tremendous vitality. It is this vitality which has enabled it to withstand the shock of time and change and the challenge of new ways of thought.

Fundamentally, therefore, it is philosophy which has determined Indian culture in all its various manifestations. The wide variety of the country, not only in her geography but also in her tribes and languages, customs and beliefs, political organisations and stages of culture, prepared the mind to an acceptance of difference and the search for unity in the midst of diversity. It was the peculiar glory of the Aryan invaders who came to this land that they could formulate a philosophical expression for this acceptance. The result has been that in spite of the most baffling differences in form, there is a unity, a continuity and strangest of all a unanimity in Indian thought which astonishes not only foreign observers but Indian students as well.

Indian philosophy has never been confined to the intellect alone, but taken up in its orbit the search for a new way of life. Indian philosophy is therefore essentially practical. Though this may have circumscribed the limits of its speculative adventure, it has helped in the integration of Indian life into a unity which recognises all differences as so many manifestations of the one reality. Neither solely worldly nor exclusively other worldly, it helped both to justify and encourage a synthetic attitude of the mind. The world was conceived as a unity of reality manifesting itself in many different appearances. Religion was seen as a unity of truth expressing itself in many different creeds. Both truth and reality are therefore understood as manifestations of the all

pervasive principle of unity in difference. This tolerant, synthetic and pervasive spirit of ancient Indian thought gave to its culture the resilience, toleration and flexibility which has enabled it to permeate the entire mass of the people and resist all attempts to break the continuity and life of the ancient tradition.

The unity of outlook which expressed itself in political institutions and economic organisations, in social habits and ways of life, in language and literature, art and architecture and religion and philosophy, still survives. Indian culture is thus from its earliest days the result of conflict and synthesis and the assimilation of elements from different sources into one common whole. How complete this process of integration was is proved by the fact that the foundation and frame-work of culture laid down by this early synthesis has never changed. It has no doubt grown and taken up within its orbit newer ingredients from novel sources. In spite of modifications which must result from such incorporation, all development has been along the lines laid down in the ages of the epics or perhaps still earlier. All other contemporary civilisations have disappeared and their culture is a theme for legend and history. The scientific and mechanical basis of Indian civilisation has also undergone radical change, but the outlines of Indian culture are still preserved. There can be no greater evidence of the resilience and vitality of Indian culture than the fact that its unity and continuity have never been sundered.

MEDIEVAL RECONCILIATION

THE story of Indian culture is one of continuity, synthesis and enrichment. We have already seen how the early periods saw the reconciliation of many opposite strands. The same process of conflict and synthesis, but intensified a thousand times occurred with the advent of Islam in India. For the first time in recorded history, Indian religious and social systems were faced with a system which was equally well-formulated and definite. The clash between them was accentuated by the contrast between their outlooks. Hinduism had in it an ascetic and other-wordly phase. In its concentration upon the absolute, it relegated the affairs of the world to a position of insignificance. This was the aspect which Islam found dominant when it appeared on the Indian scene. Islam on the other hand was non-ascetic and centred upon this world in a conception of life which was vital, organic and social. The younger faith challenged the assumptions of the old and shook its social structure to the very foundation.

Out of the conflict and contrast between the two outlooks arose problems which it was the task of Indian culture to solve. At first sight the present struggles between Hindus and Moslems suggest that the solution has not been complete.

When we consider the volume of the population and the many points at which their lives impinge, what is surprising is not that perfect fusion has not yet been achieved but that there should have been the degree of synthesis which has actually been realised. Besides, we also find that wherever there are points of conflict, these centre round material things. The history of India in the middle ages, as indeed of all races at all times, is a story of struggle for political power and economic supremacy. We can hardly find any trace of religious or communal conflict. The Mussalman no doubt fought the Hindu in medieval India. The fight was scarcely ever, if at all, fought over religious or communal issues. Conflicts between Moslems and Hindus were just as frequent or infrequent as those between Moslems and Moslems or Hindus and Hindus. Religious questions hardly entered into the minds of the rival protagonists.

The Arabian invasion of Sind was inspired by commercial considerations. Mahmud of Gazni's raids were more often than not directed to the exploitation of Indian wealth for the establishment and consolidation of his Turko-Persian empire. When the Afghans began to pour down into India, it was because of pressure from Central Asia which dislocated the population on the Indian borders. Aryans had come to India for identical reasons and had been followed by innumerable hordes of invaders throughout the Hindu period. The Afghan and the Turk invasions are repetitions

of the old story. Babar in his biography reveals in an unmistakable manner the operation of this principle in his personal life. It was the repetition of the old story but with one difference. The invaders who had poured into India after the Aryan incursions were, till the Afghans appeared on the scene, without any developed culture of their own and were swallowed up in the Indian stream. The new movement of peoples brought in men who had adopted the externals if not the spirit of Islamic civilisation. The problem revealed itself as one of fusion of two distinct cultures and not the absorption of one into the other.

1

THE HINDUSTHANI WAY

THE impact of Islam on India was deep and profound. The contact between new and old modes of thought compelled acute and sensitive minds to think afresh about the eternal problems of the universe. Men's minds were freed from the tyranny of old traditional ways. New religions and philosophies appeared to mark the rapprochement between Hindu and Islamic modes of thought. Yet the assimilation and synthesis between the two systems was not complete, for the facts of physical distance and inaccessibility remained. The inter-change of thought and culture between the capital and the country remained imperfect. The cities displayed the fusion of the two cultures in which the numerical inferiority of the Moslem was counter-balanced by his political importance. The small, compact and on the whole homogeneous Moslem aristocracy gave the tone to civic culture. In the country it was otherwise. Difficulties of communication preserved some of the independence of the local units. Without constant interchange of men and ideas, the inherent rigidity of social forms was able to assert itself. The result was that Moslems in the provinces were influenced by the pressure of Hindu forms of life. Rural culture, in spite of large scale changes in religion, remained

dominantly Hindu, for men changed their creed but not their way of life.

In the extant text books of Indian history, the record of difference and conflict is kept alive, but the story of fusion and synthesis is either forgotten or ignored. We are told the story of the rise and fall of dynasties, of invasions by new hordes from outside and gruesome accounts of oppression, pillage and rapine. There is hardly any mention of the growth of social or cultural institutions or the emergence of new social forms. Most Hindus believe that whatever manifestations of civilisation there were in India took shape in ancient days and hence Indian civilisation means in effect Hindu civilisation. Mussalmans on their part suffer from misgivings and doubt, for if there is no record of human progress during the many centuries they have lived in India, Indian culture must necessarily be Hindu and alien to them. It is because the co-operative effort of Hindus and Moslems in the creation of Indian culture has not been properly estimated that Moslem and Hindu look at one another with suspicion, hatred and contempt. The sense of frustration at the tremendous human wastage of more than eight hundred years is at the root of much of the communal bitterness of today.

Theoretical considerations alone are sufficient to reject such an interpretation of medieval Indian history. Even though we do not know all the facts, we can assert that it is incredible that

two rich cultures should come into contact and remain unfruitful of new synthesis. Such historical sterility would be something unprecedented in the annals of man. Hindu culture was remarkable for both volume and extent. Even if it had lost some of its primal energy by the time the Moslem appeared on the scene, it retained elements of permanent value for the human mind. It was inevitable that Moslems who came into contact with it should imbibe its spirit. Co-operation between the two would be directly proportionate to the intensity of their spiritual energy. In ancient India the higher civilisation of the pre-Aryans suffered military defeat at the hands of the invading Aryan hordes, but in time transformed Aryan mentality itself by enriching the cultural life of the conquerers. In Greece, Mycenaean civilisation was defeated on the battlefields but survived in the efflorescence of a higher Hellenic culture. The same story was repeated in the cultural conquest of Rome by Greece after Rome had conquered Greece politically. In India too in the conflict on the plane of power politics, the Moslems won but on the plane of intellectual and spiritual endeavour, the victory was mutual and can be more properly described as intimate and far-reaching co-operation.

The real history of India in the Middle Ages is thus the record of attempts at synthesis and co-operation between Hindu and Moslem on a thousand planes. The names of Ramananda and

Kabir, of Nanak and Chaitanya come readily to the mind. The growth of Vaishnavism in Bengal and of the Bhakti cult in Maharashtra may be directly attributed to this fusion of religious cultures. It was not on the spiritual plane alone that there were attempts at co-operative activity. At first under the Pathans and later on a wider scale the Moghuls, this is unmistakable in the evolution of customs and conduct, fashions and festivals, in the very preparation of food and social and household affairs. In the matter of dress, a new costume was evolved which marks a breakaway from Arab or Central Asian influence. This period also saw the growth of a new langauage which serves to this day as a medium of communication between Indians of different races and regions. The rich literature in many of the Indian languages serve as reminders of the growth of culture in Medieval India. In every sphere of social, political and cultural life we find the same impulse of fusion and synthesis. In architecture and sculpture, music and painting, in social habits and popular beliefs, the fusion of the old and the new created new forms in which the contribution of the two are inextricably mixed. In a word the mentality of the Moslem and the Hindu was so fused in the various manifestations of Indian genius that anybody who prides today in the unadulterated purity of his Hindu culture or his Moslem heritage shows a lamentable lack of historical knowledge and insight. Even as early as the time of Babar the process of assimilation

had gone so far that he could characterise it as a unique mode of life—a mode to which he gave the name of the Hindusthani way.

The worlds of philosophy and economics are at the first sight almost totally unrelated. Yet in both these spheres we find unmistakable traces of co-operation between the Moslem and the Hindu. It is indeed difficult to say how much of the present world outlook of the Indian Hindu is derived from Vedas and the Upanishads and how much from the teachings of Islam. In exactly a similar manner, in belief and in behaviour, in habits and in social institutions, the Indian Moslem shows unmistakable traces of the influence of Hindu culture and outlook. The influence of India was not in fact confined to Indian Moslems alone but affected the development of Moslem theology in Persia and Arabia as well. Buddhist modes of thought had penetrated as far west as Egypt. There are scholars who find anticipations of the Sermon on the Mount in the earlier writings and edicts of Buddhism. The Essenes have at times been regarded as a Buddhist sect who settled down in Asia Minor. The basis of Sufism is to be sought in the Koran, but it has been profoundly influenced by the currents of Indian thought. Christianity and neo-Platonism, Zoroastrianism and Manism contributed to its development but perhaps the single largest external influence was the impact of Hinduism and of Buddhist philosophy. How else can one explain its attempt to submerge the individual in the Absolute in

direct opposition to the traditions of Semitic religions since the time of Moses?

Reciprocity is the law in the sphere of mental influence. Profoundly affected by the modes of Indian thought, Sufism had in its turn a far-reaching influence on the Hindu religious outlook. Few suspect any external influence on the Vedanta of Sankara and yet there are reasons to suppose that he was influenced by the impact of Islam on the prevalent modes of thought. Since the beginning of recorded history, all new movements in Hindu thought, all innovations in Indian religion and philosophy had their origin in northern India. Suddenly about the beginning of the eighth century, there is a revolutionary change. The leadership of Indian thought and life is transferred to the south. Sankara and Ramanuja, Nimbaditya and Vallabhacharyya are all men of southern India. It is in the south that Vaishnavism and Saivaism rise and flourish. Political and social changes in the north cannot alone explain the sudden transformation and historians have been puzzled by the sudden shift in the centre of national activities. We find a clue to the solution of the mystery if we connect it with the advent of Islam in the south about the middle of the seventh century.

The first advent of Islam on Indian soil was in the south. Long before the conquest of Sind by Mahmud Bin Kasim, Arab traders came into contact with the people of Travancore. This

peaceful penetration went so far that the last of the Cheraman Perumal kings of Malabar was converted to Islam and left his kingdom on a pilgrimage to Mecca. The title of Zamorin of Calicut bears testimony to the authenticity of this tradition. Even to this day, a Mopla must be chosen to anoint him king. Kaladi, where Sankara was born belonged to a small principality whose king had also accepted Islam. There is no evidence that these conversions were the result of military conquest. Nor is there any indication that the change of faith by the king resulted in any large scale conversions among the people at large. Such conversions however indicate the extent and depth of the influence of Moslem thought on contemporary life in southern India.

The contact and conflict of the two modes of thought quickened new questionings in the individual mind. It was inevitable that an intellect so acute and vigorous as Sankara should be attracted by this alien mode of thought and absorb out of it elements that suited his own cast of mind. The old religious faith and world outlook of northern India was synthetic, decorous and contemplative. The mentality revealed in the new south Indian philosophy of life was aggressive and intense in its emotional abundance as well as its emphasis upon activity. The passivist, self-centred and predominantly intellectual mentality of the north was suddenly transformed into a revolutionary urgency in which even the intellect became an instrument of passion. Perhaps

each single item in Sankara's philosophy may be derived from old Upanishadic sources but the temper and shape of the synthesis achieved suggest the operation of some novel element. Is it fanciful to find in Sankara's fervour and zeal traces of the influence of the revolutionary zeal of Islam?

Sankara is from many points of view one of the most interesting figures in the history of Indian culture. It has been the practice to regard him as a product of purely Indian modes of thought. In fact it is even said that he was the champion of orthodox Brahmanical traditions against the liberal but heterogenous teachings of Buddhism. It is also held that he carried the doctrine of unreality of the universe to its logical extreme with the result that no room was left for morality and righteousness. Sankara's absolute monism does at first sight seem to reject the world as mere illusion but if the world were mere illusion, all earthly activities would lose their significance. The Buddhists would then be justified in regarding all life as a bondage from which man must strive to escape by the suppression of desire. Even those who regard Sankara as the prophet of *mayabad* however agree that he was vehement opponent of the Buddhist doctrine of Nirvana and the passivism which resulted from it.

Sankara's chief importance in the history of Indian thought lies in the fact that he sought to

meet and answer Buddhist metaphysics on its own ground. With the Buddhists, he also denied the transcendental reality of the world and pointed out the self-contradictions which arise from a consistent materialism. From the contradictory character of ordinary experience, the Buddhists inferred that experience was unreal. Sankara pointed out that the inference was not justified for it was itself based on experience. He substituted in place of the concept of unreality that of inexpressibility or mystery. To condemn experience as unreal leaves unexplained why there should at all be experience. To describe it as illusory demands an analysis of the nature of the illusory. Even what we regard as illusions are thus in the ultimate analysis *anirvachaniya* or a mystery.

Sankara thus recognised the value of the contribution made by Buddha in the realm of pure metaphysics. He also saw that the pure nihilism of the Buddhist philosophy destroyed the very basis of morality for the ordinary man. He therefore accepted the Buddhist contention that the inner reality is the Idea. Unlike Buddhists, he held that this Idea is a permanent everlasting unity, the real substratum underlying and supplying the basis of existence of everything in the world. As manifestations or forms of this Idea function through Maya, everything is relatively real, continues to be real and has to be accepted as real. It is only when, through attainment of supreme knowledge, men actually

realise that Brahman is the one and only reality that they can transcend this empirical point of view.

Along with his acceptance of the Buddhist metaphysics, Sankara accepted Vedic ritual and theology. He also emphasised the importance of such ritual for common men. He unequivocally recognised and accepted the usefulness of such acts as worship and meditation. It was through the devotional aspect of his activity and the recognition that meditation without a concrete object could not satisfy the ordinary man that he made the most important contribution towards the upliftment of the country and the permeation of a common philosophy throughout the masses.

The third element in Sankara's philosophy and teaching is the emphasis on action which he not only preached but also practised. The idea that Sankara discarded all action has become ingrained in our minds. We do not realise that this, if true, would make him a follower of the Buddhist metaphysics which he so vehemently attacked. He declares again and again that various acts prescribed in the scriptures must not be discarded and are essential in the earlier stages. This emphasis on action may be in the nature of a reaction from the denial of activity in both depraved Hinduism and depraved Buddhism prevalent at the time of his birth. It may also have been an element derived from the teachings of the Gita. Another, and some scholars have

suggested, a more plausible ground for the emphasis on action may be found in the fact that Islam had already made itself felt as a force in the country of Sankara's birth. The fact that the emphasis on action is combined with a passionate insistence upon the unity of the Brahman reveals a source of affinity with Islam which is as strange as it is interesting.

Sankara's life and teaching is a shining example of the spirit of synthesis which is a peculiar characteristic of Indian Culture. His teachings combined the best elements in Hinduism and Buddhism. He evolved a practical philosophy which reconciled the two major religious systems of the land and set at rest the internecine warfare between the Buddhist and the Hindu. In addition, he incorporated into his synthesis those elements of the teaching of Islam which were most suited to the genius of the land. His extreme monism, his repudiation of all semblance of duality, his attempt to establish this monism on the authority of revealed scriptures, his tendency to regard his own activity as mere restoration of the original purity of the revealed truth are all elements which remind one strongly of the tenets of Islam. When one connects this similarity in outlook with the appearance of Islam as a living force in his birthplace just before his birth, the inference that he was influenced by the new faith can hardly be resisted.

Sankara thus laid the foundation of the attempts at synthesis which constitute the religious history of India during the Middle Ages. Ramananda and Kabir, Nanak and Dadu, Chaitanya and Tukaram all carried on the same tradition. The most significant characteristic of these attempts at synthesis lies in the fact that there is no break or wrench from the past. The novel elements are skilfully and almost imperceptibly fused with the old and maintain the unity and continuity of the Indian spiritual outlook and endeavour.

2

ECONOMICS AND ART

IN the field of economic organisation, medieval India exhibits the same story of conflict and synthesis. The old agricultural economy was yielding place to a new feudalism based upon the fact of conquest. Within the rigid structure of this system, Alauddin's attempt to regulate the price of the necessities of life indicates a social consciousness transcending, however imperfectly, the limitations of individual interest. Muhammad Tughlak's attempt to introduce a leather currency was premature and failed, but this also reveals a dim awareness of the character of money as a mere medium of exchange without any intrinsic value of its own. The interplay of political and economic factors has not escaped the notice of

careful students. The close relation of capitalism and the Nation-state has often been noticed and yet such interactions are forgotten or ignored in the case of Indian history. We find hardly any recognition of the ways in which the measures of Akbar, perhaps without any realisation on his part, prepared the ground for the advent of capitalism. He introduced payment in currency in place of payment in kind in most state transactions, and in other ways encouraged the substitution of barter by a money economy. The reorganisation of land tenure started by Sher Shah was also concluded by him. All these point towards the future suppression of feudalism by capitalist modes of production, but the process was not completed as its first condition, viz., the conquest and utilisation of the forces of nature, was still unrealised.

The origin of the struggle between individuals and groups in medieval India, as perhaps in other ages and elsewhere, is thus to be found in secular causes. That this was the case can be established by considering one remarkable phenomenon in the history of the times. The correlation between social and geographical conditions in Central Asia and the invasions of India has often been indicated. A phenomenon which has not yet received the attention it deserves is the emergence and duration of the Rajput power in medieval India. Speaking generally, one might say that before the eighth century and after the age of Aurangzeb, the Rajputs have hardly any importance in Indian

history. But during this thousand years or so, they dominate Indian history and this in spite of their numerical and political inferiority to many other Indian groups and principalities. Before the eighth century the centre of power in Indian politics shifted along the banks of the Ganges. From Asoka right up to the days of Harsha Vardhana, it was from the east that political leadership came. From the eighth century onward we find a remarkable change. The centre of power shifts from the east and hovers round the central point of Delhi for about a thousand years. This was also the period of Rajput glory and rise to power.

The explanation of this phenomenon seems to lie in the shifting of the commercial orientation of India. Till the eighth century, Indian trade routes pointed mainly towards the east. Towards the east lay the Indian colonies and overseas settlements. Contact with countries so far off as China and Japan was continuous and extensive. There are no doubt references to trade with Europe as well but this could hardly compare with India's eastern trade. The result was that Indian political life leaned towards the east to derive its sustenance from the wealth which poured into the country from regions beyond the seas. From the seventh century, the situation changed. With the rise of Arab power, a new maritime trade developed between India and the west. We have already referred to Arab contacts with southern India from the seventh century and the Arab

invasions of Sind in the eighth century on account of commercial reasons. Gujrat became one of the centres of this trade and wealth began to pour into India from the west.

This reorientation of Indian commerce synchronises with the rise of Rajputs to importance. What gives greater piquancy to the suggestion of a relation between the two is the fact that Rajputana lies directly on the trade route from Delhi to Gujrat. The control of this route soon became the key to domination over the whole of northern India. We find that the story starts with the struggle between Rajput chieftains to achieve supremacy over this region. Soon the struggle between Rajput chiefs gives place to the conflict between Mewar and Delhi. From the time of Alauddin right down to the days of Akbar, the course of Indian history centres round this struggle. The battle-cry used in this struggle was often religious or communal, but the core of the conflict undoubtedly lay in the desire to control this important trade route and thus dominate the economic life of the country.

The sudden fading of Rajput power out of the picture is equally significant. Aurangzeb's campaigns against Raj Sinha offer hardly any explanation, for the conflict in this case was even more indecisive than the earlier struggles between Delhi and Mewar. Alauddin and Babar had inflicted much severer defeats and yet Rajput power could not be crushed by them. Akbar

combined military pressure with friendly overtures to tame them and harness their energy to the expansion and maintenance of his empire, but even he could not stamp out their power or resilience. The real explanation must, therefore, be sought in a different field. It is plausible to hold that the collapse of Rajput power, like its rise, is to be attributed to a new shift in the centres of Indian trade and commerce. As Arab commerce with India became more important than Indian commerce with the East Indies and Malaya, Gujrat became the trade-mart of India and Rajputana rose to military prominence. With the discovery of the route round the Cape of Good Hope and establishment of trade centres in Calicut and the east coast of India, the importance of Gujrat declined. With it declined the importance of the Rajputs in Indian history. The rise of Mahratta power synchronises with this new development. The establishment of Portuguese, Dutch and other European trade connections with India made the control of the Western Ghats one of the most important factors in the economic life of India. With the growth of European trade interests, the economic life of the country flowed into new channels. The centres of political life shifted to Madras and Calcutta. Soon Rajputs and Mahrattas were both reduced to political unimportance. The Mahrattas continued the struggle for a century, but after the replacement of the Portuguese and the Dutch by the French and the British as the main carriers of

Indo-European trade, they also gradually lost in importance. The emergence of the port of Bombay, however, assured that they would not fade away from the picture. The history of the wars of the Rajputs and the Mahrattas against Delhi has often been held up as a case of the struggle between Hindus and Moslems on religious and communal grounds. The above analysis suggests that such history is, on the contrary, standing evidence of the fact that conflicts generate on the plane of material interest and introduction of religious or cultural elements is fortuitous and accidental.

The urge to unity and continuity is exhibited also in the development of Indian art in all its forms. Indian culture, we have seen, was built on the principle of unity in diversity. In religion it led to an abstraction from all outward phenomenon and realisation in mystic ecstasy of the identity of the self with God. When this vision of the inner unity is gained, there is a return to the world. The manifoldness of phenomena is then seen as the significant manifestations of a fundamental unity. Architecture was the objectification of this consciousness in solid mass. Outside, the temple luxuriates in form. Not an inch of empty space is to be found anywhere. The unbounded opulence of detail and ornament serves to manifest the real which is the transcendental totality of all forms. The shrine inside is on the other hand a small dark cell with scarcely one ray of light. There the soul of man

must stand alone, face to face with the eternal mystery.

Instances of a purely Hindu style are to be found mainly in the south. This does not imply that there is any single style which can be characterised as southern. It only implies that in spite of differences and variations the southern structures show a basic identity in conception and execution. This is equally true of the structures of the north and differentiates them from similar architectural experiments in other countries of the world. The palaces, forts and tombs of northern India during the Middle Ages show traces of Persian influence. In spite of their similarity to Persian models, they reveal features that are alien to the ideals of Persian architecture. Though influenced deeply by Persian tendencies they have their basis in the traditions of ancient India.

In the temples of the south, it is the straight line which dominates. All elaboration is based upon the composition of lines and angles. Another striking feature of this temple architecture is the exuberance of its sculptural decoration. Each pillar is carved out of solid rock and embellished with a hundred forms. The variety is so great that there is hardly the repetition of a single theme. In the famous temple at Canjeevaram there are about a thousand pillars. Not one pillar is a replica of any other. Even in the smaller temple at Simhachalam, the pillars are all of different forms and motifs. The aim of this archi-



CROSS-SECTION OF INDIAN ARCHITECTURE 300 B.C. TO 1700 A.D.

For details see on the reverse

1. Sanchi Stupa. 2. Temple of Bodh Gaya Restored. 3. Vishnu Shrine, Barwar Sagar, C. P. 4. The Great Temple, Tanjore. 5. Kutubminar, Delhi. 6. Tomb of Ghiyas-Uddin Tughluq. 7. Jain Temple, Palitana. 8. Tower of Victory, Chitor. 9. Tomb of Humayun, Delhi. 10. Buland Darwaza, Fatehpur Sikri. 11. Tajmahal, Agra. 12. Tomb of Muhammad Adil Shah, Bijapur.

tecture seems to be to overwhelm our minds through an abundance of form and splendour.

The contrast with the architecture of the north is so glaring that it does not escape even the merest amateur. Even the temples there have broken away from the domination of the straight line. They exhibit a composition of the arch and the circle which subtly transforms the atmosphere. It is true that domes are rare, but even the turrets are different from those of the south. Those familiar only with the north cannot fully realise this. To them the difference between the temple and the mosque seems more prominent than their underlying similarity. But to those who have seen only the temples of the south, all architecture of the north seems imbued with a subtle aroma of the mosque. This is not surprising, for all the finest structures of the north are informed by a spirit of harmony and fusion of the two styles.

Economy of sculpture and other decoration in the north is not a mere accident. The emphasis is on symmetry of lines and balancing of masses. Volumes have been so disposed as to create an impression of uniformity. Architecture in the north centres round a basic idea. Its value lies in harmony of structural achievement rather than the splendour and variety of the constituent units. It is remarkable that this synthesis could be achieved even in the case of temple architecture. Though foreign influences may be adopted in other spheres, the tendency is to resist its application to the

religious field. The fact that Hindu architectural genius could even in the religious field adapt Moslem ideals to its own purposes is evidence of its strength and vitality.

The influence was not and in fact could not be one-sided. While saracenic styles influenced old Indian traditions, they in their turn profoundly affected the character of Moslem architecture in India. One of the main characteristics of Moslem architecture was its simplicity and severity. Line meets line with an austere grace in which there is hardly any room for superfluous decoration. Even where there are embellishments, these take the form of geometrical patterns or calligraphy raised to a fine art. In the architecture of northern India, this general principle undergoes an almost revolutionary change. Hindu and Moslem elements coalesce to form a new type of architecture. The severity of Moslem architecture was mellowed down and the plastic exuberance of the Hindu was curtailed. The Saracenic emphasis on harmony and form blended with the Indian emphasis on splendour and decoration. Where the fusion is complete, we have miracles of architecture like the Taj Mahal. Often the two systems have not been perfectly fused and we find domination of the one or the other style. Architectural curiosities like Fatehpur Sikri or the Itmaddoula remain as unfulfilled experiments in synthesis. One need not refer to specific instances of Hindu patterns incorporated in the Moslem architecture of the period. The lotus and the pitcher supply a

constant motif in the constructions of the Hindu period, but we find its skilful use in the tombs of Moslem kings as well.

A nation is immortalized in its art. The political landscape may change from day to day and the shifting scenes leave no permanent impression on the world's mind. Even in philosophy the details often crowd out the outline of the whole till the soul is lost in the intricacies of the intellect. In art, however, it is only the simple and elemental that remain and stamp themselves upon the racial consciousness. That is why a nation's art reveals its inmost character and fixes it for succeeding ages and generations.

Of all the arts, painting is perhaps the most elemental and permanent. Words are counters in man's social intercourse. With change in social forms they also change. Music is elemental, but it is hardly permanent. The feelings it evokes are so fleeting and formless that its appeal seldom goes beyond a vague stirring of the soul. Its lack of definiteness disqualifies it for the full expression of the peculiar racial genius of a people.

Painting reaches back to fundamentals and yet expresses particular racial or temporal physiognomy. The meticulous precision of old Persian painting is as significant of race as the elemental economy of Chinese art. The solidarity of Dutch bourgeois civilisation confronts the tortured soul of modern Europe in the painting of the two periods more truthfully and effectively than

perhaps in any other form of art. And what is true of painting elsewhere is equally true of painting in India.

We need not linger over the long and forgotten history of Indian painting in the early ages. A hostile climate and the ravages of time destroyed what succeeding tides of invaders had left. Forgotten in the caves of Ajanta are precious achievements which preserve the memory of an attempt to paint in timelessness. An amazing plasticity of form conceals the movement away from the solid and the tangible. The Indian summer irradiates heat and light, but the very radiance dissolves the individuality of objects into a blurred harmony of vague outline. These frescoes are the aesthetic expression of a culture which grew out of the synthesis of the experience of many races and imply a balance between opposing tendencies. The walls and ceilings at Ajanta are covered with scenes drawn equally from the life of the crowd and the life of the devotee. The first type of pictures is inundated by the joy of life and represents power and glory, love and youth. The second group depicts the unexciting and tranquil life of meditation and represents detachment and devotion, piety and faith. But the two worlds are treated neither separately nor differently. They exhibit the same consciousness of the intense pressure and throng of life which we have noticed in the pre-Islamic architecture of India. The figures crowd upon one another. Men, women and children in all postures and attitudes

are put together in bewildering confusion. It seems as if the painter was oppressed with illimitable fecundity of life and sought to grasp and render it by the exuberance of his art. In all this variety, the sense of the unity of the real is never lost. The sanctity of all phenomena is expressed through the wonderful intimacy which the artist establishes between his human and his non-human figures. What makes the achievement at Ajanta even more amazing is that the medium through which the intensity of this thronging and unified life is rendered is the line. It is a visual representation of the intuition of the unity underlying all phenomena.

The change to the sharp precision of Moghul and Rajput painting is almost dialectical. Nevertheless the change is neither arbitrary nor abrupt. The art which was brought to India by Babar and his descendants was inspired by an intense individuality. It was not interested in crowds or masses and had hardly any direct interest in composition. It saw things in clear light and in definite outline. It looked at every detail of the individual figure and took infinite pains with it. Born and cradled in the courts of Chengiz and Timur, it could not conceivably be soft or sentimental. It felt the urge of life with tremendous force and communicated its passionate energy to what it painted. The stamp of individualism in such painting reached exaggerated lengths. Painting became mere portraiture, but portraiture of amazing cleverness. When this vigorous and in-

dividualistic style of painting met the traditional painting of India, a new style was evolved which combined elements of both. Upon the plasticity of Ajanta were imposed new lines of symmetry, proportion and spacing. Devoid of the intense aspiration of ancient Indian painting, this world of courtly manners shows an innate lyricism always mindful of decorum. The abstraction of ancient Indian art arises out of the stretching of feelings beyond human capacity. In Moghul and Rajput painting the abstractness is the result of simplification and control. The one is ecstatic, the other static, but even its staticness is informed by the memory of former ecstasy.

The classical music of India reminds one at every stage of the temples of the south. The solidity of structure and profusion of details stamp them with an unmistakable identity. The music of the north offers a sharp contrast. The solidity is replaced by an airy grace. Wealth of details gives place to spacing and harmony. Two different and contrary tendencies rule all art. One aims at decoration, prolixity and splendour. The other is dominated by the ideal of simplicity, economy and sobriety. The one seeks to overwhelm us by the profusion of form and the excess of its material wealth. The other attempts to influence us through economy of material and the restraint of its modes of expression. The former carries aesthetic experiment to its ultimate limits and seeks to express everything. The latter leaves the greater portion unexpressed and conveys its

message by the barest hints and suggestions. The former expresses itself through the wealth of its achievement, the latter through the creation of a background where imagination finds free play.

These two modes express two complimentary ideals of life. We find perfection in art where the rival streams of romantic and classical tendency are held in exquisite balance. We find a new excellence in life where the mentalities represented by these ideals are fused to create a new philosophy and culture. The Indian and Saracenic styles supply complementary elements whose fusion created not only a great art but a deep abiding culture.

3

MODES OF OUTLOOK

THE contact and fusion of Hindu and Moslem cultures in the south was responsible for the birth of a new philosophy. It is not surprising that the impact should be first felt in the sphere of the intellect. First acquaintance attracts the intellect more than the heart. Truths accepted by the intellect do not immediately influence behaviour. The time-lag between intellectual acceptance and emotional assimilation has often been noticed. But once a truth sinks into the consciousness, it begins to mould our emotions and gives rise to new experiments in art. Because this requires time,

we find that Indo-Saracenic art flourished mainly in the north.

We have pointed to the synthesis of Hindu and Moslem models in the achievements of Indian architecture. The Vaishnava songs and lyrics of Bengal offer another instance of such assimilation and synthesis. The elements for the emergence of a successful art were present in Bengal from early times. The advent of Islam acted as a catalytic agent which fused the elements together and brought Vaishnava poetry to its birth.

The Vaishnava poetry of Bengal is a miracle of synthesis, for it fuses an active mentality with a passive philosophy of illusion. The spirituality which is often regarded as a distinguishing feature of Hindu mentality has in it an element of passivity and quiescence. One cannot but believe that in the early contacts between Moslem and Hindu, the first reaction of the Hindu was one of revolt. When the revolt failed, it led to a defeatism which expressed itself as indifference to the world. This ascetic reaction sought to glorify the spirit and forgot even the glorious achievements of the Hindus on the worldly plane. There are few records to-day of the magnificence and splendour of Hindu India. The story of Indian expansion and colonial conquests are to-day mere legends. The manifold activities of the human mind which characterized the life of ancient India were reduced to a dull ascetic grey by the time of the Middle Ages. Nor is this surprising. A mentality

of asceticism is a necessary corrolary to foreign conquest and domination. Even a society which is so essentially anti-ascetic as the Moslem developed an ascetic attitude after the British conquest of India. Hopes of reward and glory in an after-life were evoked to crowd out the consciousness of bitter defeats in the present. Dreams of transcendental excellence sought to cover up the agony of empirical disasters of every day.

This spirit of ascetism had served a useful social purpose in the economy of pre-Moslem culture in India. The emphasis upon the Absolute made men indifferent to inequalities in the material world. It reconciled to their fate those whom society had condemned to a hardly human life. This ascetic temper also explains why men did not revolt against social tyranny and injustice. Every man is a replica of the Brahman. The Brahman is absolute and therefore beyond space, time and appearance. In consequence the indignities of the individual in empirical life could be ignored or explained away as mere illusions which would disappear on the cessation of this transitory life.

The impact of Islam shook this asceticism to its very foundations. Islam was essentially a religion centred upon this world and gave equal value to empirical and transcendental considerations. It brought a dynamic message of social democracy that few systems of existing political or social civilization could resist. It taught men that equality and fraternity must be realised in the life

of day to day and could not be relegated to some remote and unearthly future. Like an explosive force it burst through the bonds and conventions which shackled the human mind. The oppressed and destitute responded to that appeal everywhere and co-operated in its victories. It was this message of freedom for the individual in his daily life that made the advance of Islam so swift and irresistible.

In the Vaishnava poetry of Bengal we find an artistic representation of this conflict and its resolution. Its central motif is love and its attitude towards love is an exquisite expression of the synthesis achieved. Love is not merely a physical or mental state. Still less is it a mere sensation. It is an eager and insistent urge of mind and body. It symbolises the creative power of society and the individual. The rationalist cannot explain it away. Those who seek to account for it in terms of biological necessity alone also fail. Perhaps it can be best understood as the individual's adventure into the uncharted future from the certainties of his past and present. Activity is the essence of such adventure and the bolder the adventure, the purer the activity. Such activity frees itself from the bonds of purpose and is an expression of the sheer joy of life. The manifestation of unpurposive energy constitutes pure play.

We find that all analyses of love finally lead to its conception as a mode of play. In Vaishnava poetry this is expressed as Leela,—pure play of

the spirit which is undetermined and indeterminate. This is, however, activity at its purest, but in the Leela of Vaishnava poetry, we still find traces of the old passivity of mind. We find that throughout the variations of emotion and sentiment, the poet is always a passive object of love. Nowhere is he the lover. Everywhere he is the beloved. This may at first sight seem inevitable, for the relation of the human soul to the ultimate reality must be one of subjection and surrender. This is, however, based on an illusion. On the level of common experience, the quest of the human soul for the infinite must take this form. From the point of view of commonsense, this quest is however symbolic and possesses merely metaphorical validity. When the quest ceases to be symbolic, and becomes the sole reality for the soul, we reach a level of experience where the distinction of subject and object is lost. It is no longer tied down to the commonsense conception of the human soul as dependent and limited. At such levels the difference between the lover and beloved disappears. In Vaishnava poetry, the distinction persists. This shows that the philosophy of illusion has not been completely overcome. On the other hand, the emphasis is on love as Leela or pure activity. This shows that the fatalistic conception of reality has been shaken to its very foundations.

This fusion seems to be the result of synthesis between the Hindu and the Moslem outlook on

life. Most manifestations of the Indian spirit in the pre-Moslem period are tinged with a note of *mayabad*. Such conception allows little scope for the development of individuality. The consciousness of difference between individuals is faint. The philosophy of *maya* helps to explain why men suffered the inequalities and indignities of life so patiently. Belief in rebirth is also a direct consequence of this attitude of mind. The theory of re-birth denies progress on the one hand and on the other, through its emphasis on the unity and equality of all life, pares away empirical inequalities. A conception which seeks to give the same value to insects and birds and beasts and men cannot consistently with its assumptions emphasise either progress or human superiority. On the other hand Islam insisted upon the superiority of man and declared him to be the lord of creation. He is subject only to the governance of God. This is echoed in the words of the Vaishnava poet who proclaims that man is the highest truth and there is nothing higher than realisation of this fact.

We saw the role which story-tellers and wandering minstrels played in the diffusion of culture in ancient India. They explain the pervasiveness of philosophy in different planes of society. A curious evidence of this is provided by the development of the Punthi literature under the Moslems. Among the Hindus, the story-teller was never at a loss for the materials of his craft. He could draw upon the unlimited resources of

the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranic legends to delight, amuse and educate the people. This is the way in which the teachings of Hinduism have permeated the masses. Through the story-teller, the characters and incidents of Hindu mythology became common currency in the social and intellectual intercourse of the people.

The Moslem story-teller was at a comparative disadvantage, for the element of myth and legend is negligible in pristine Islam. Nor do the people delight in literature that is merely elevating. To live on the solid bread of religious instruction and moral homilies is dreary. Even miracles, without the sugar-coating of human interest to cover the core of theological need, soon pall upon the taste. The Hindu legends supply adventure and moral tales, escapades and intrigues, treachery and devotion and all the diverse strands which make up the complex pattern of human life. But the story-teller was not to be so easily foiled. If Moslem history did not supply him with a mythology, there was nothing to prevent his inventing one.

As in other fields, here also Akbar was the first to experiment in a conscious and systematic way. The process may have started long before his time, in all probability it did. The innovator we know is rarely an innovator. He is in most cases the man who succeeded where his predecessors had failed. In any case the story goes

that it was Akbar who first commissioned his court wit, Birbal, to prepare a Moslem version of the Mahabharata. We all probably know the amusing but slightly indecorous sequel. Birbal enjoyed the Emperor's munificence as long as he could and then presented him with a poser that proved fatal to the projected work: "The Mahabharata attributes five husbands to Draupadi. How many husbands would the Emperor like for his queen in his new Mahabharata? And which among his courtiers should they be?"

This story may be, and in all probability is pure fiction. But even legends conceal a core of fact and the story sums up for us a process that was real and continuous. The Mussalman must have felt the need of meeting Hinduism on its grounds. The story-teller was a missionary too powerful to neglect, and soon we find Moslem story-tellers and minstrels who compete on equal terms with their Hindu rivals. If the Hindu could sing of Rama and Lakshmana and their lifelong devotion to one another, the Moslem could retort with the deeds of Amir Hanifa, a lengendary brother of Hassan and Hussain. Ali became a sort of mythical hero who combined in his person the roles of Bhima and Arjuna. Even the exploits of Hanuman, a monkey god and devoted worshipper of Rama, were not allowed to go unchallenged. The character of Amir Ummiya was invented to serve as his counterpart.

Hanuman is immortalised in popular imagination by the mighty leap with which he cleared the seas and went on to set Lanka on fire; Amir Ummiya does not lag behind, for he too leaps through the air from shore to shore and is in his own way a valiant if unorthodox fighter. Even today, in villages and among large masses of the people, Punthi literature with its mixture of the grotesque and the heroic, fulfils a function which in the case of corresponding classes among the Hindus is performed by the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

The religious skeleton of these tales is often the same all over India, but the clothing of flesh and blood differs from province to province. Just as Jesus is a valiant fighter in old Saxon poetry, a champion who delights in battle for its own sake, in India, too, we find that the legendary heroes change their character from province to province. Change of character is perhaps too strong a word. The general outline of the story must of necessity remain the same, but there is just the slightest, change in nuance or shade which makes the hero the embodiment of the local outlook. Thus the Rama of Bengali folk-lore differs, however slightly, from the Rama of Tulsidas. Krishna in Bengal is the quintessence of a definite Bengali type. Even the heroes in the literary folk literature of the Mussalmans exhibit this tendency to provincialism. The Amir Hamza of Bengali Punthi literature is essentially a child of the native environment.

The similarities of the folk literature of the different provinces are not half so interesting as their differences. The latter indicate the peculiar social history of each locality and enshrine for us the customs and traditions which were built up through their peculiar circumstances. It is not without significance that the idea of a voyage recurs again and again in the ballads and songs of Eastern Bengal. The hero is more often a merchant than a king, though in almost all other parts of India, the legends centre round a fighter or a prince. Gujrat is perhaps the only other exception but the exception itself is revealing. We read of merchant princes who assembled large fleets and sailed across the seas in quest of trade. Adventures on the high seas, and in lands across the sea, the fate of wives and daughters who were left behind, the possibility of quick rise to wealth or sudden collapse of fortune,—the story-teller was free to play on all the stops of human emotion and sometimes raise the hearts of his audience to ecstatic expectancy and then let it droop in the trough of dejection and despair. Something of the eager, adventurous and sea-faring life of the times was shared even by those who had never moved out of their villages.

The story-teller was often also a historian of contemporary manners. The social repurcussions of the Moslem conquest were not confined to the capital or the military and aristocratic classes. Even in the villages, piquant situations arose and the story-teller did not hesitate to employ to the

full the openings offered to him. The wars of the mythological heroes were fought again, and took a new significance in the light of current events. Religious themes were re-interpreted to suit modern needs, and changing customs enbalmed in the changeless medium of art.

Some of the aspects of the interaction of the Hindu and the Moslem elements in the evolution of Indian culture have been indicated above. The account must from the very nature of the case remain incomplete. When two powerful currents meet, there is no question of the absorption of the one in the other. The two streams join to create a new form. Their separate contributions can hardly be distinguished. The same thing happens when two living organisms unite. A new organism is born which shares the characteristics of the parents, and is yet a unique individual. Inter-penetration is complete and no element can remain unchanged in the new synthesis.

This is what happend in the evolution of Indian culture in the Middle Ages. Old values were transmuted and even ancient themes were informed by the new spirit. We have referred to changes in the intellectual outlook and achievements in the fields of painting, architecture and poetry. These touch only a fringe of the problem, for the same story of synthesis is repeated in every sphere of life. The growth of a new language is by itself enough to demand the study of a life time. The subtle changes in the tone and

temper of Indian painting and music form an equally fascinating theme.

This integrating tendency is not new, for it characterised the development of ancient Indian culture as well. Integration and synthesis in the Middle Ages was possible because of the vitality of the cultures which participated in such synthesis. Inert matter can be brought into juxtaposition but do not merge or blend into one another. The adventure of the human spirit which started in this ancient land thousands of years ago has therefore never stopped. Indian culture underwent remarkable changes in the early period. When confronted with a foreign and developed culture, it absorbed the latter and grew richer in the process. The story is not yet over. The process of synthesis continues to this day. With the condensation of space and time it is bound to lead to still higher achievements of the human mind. In this capacity for renewal and infinite growth lies the secret of the unity and continuity of the culture of India.

MODERN FERMENT

A POWER of assimilation and synthesis has throughout the ages characterised the Indian spirit. We have seen its workings in the religious thought and social institutions of ancient India. It is equally manifest in the persistent efforts at the conciliation of conflicting tendencies during the medieval period. Civilisations with differing history and background were sought to be cast in one common mould. The genius of opposing cultures united to produce a rich and complex pattern of unrivalled beauty. Before the pattern could be completed, new and strange ingredients were introduced from a novel and unexpected quarter.

1

IN THE MELTING POT

WHEN Europe appeared on the Indian scene, the struggle between the various forces working there had achieved a temporary balance. The religious cults of the saints and mystics mark the attempt at rapprochement in one direction The lessening of the rigours of caste marked it in another. The comparative economic and political stability of the country under the Great Moghuls is evidence that a balance had been reached in these spheres as well.

It was, however, an unstable equilibrium. From the very nature of the case, the process of such synthesis can never be complete. Introduction of a single new element or the least shift in the relative importance of existing elements alters the balance and the changes which follow prove revolutionary. The advent of the West was a tremendous fact. It not only brought many new elements into the Indian cauldron but also disturbed the existing disposition of forces in Indian society. This released a mass of pent-up energy accumulated through centuries of strife and synthesis. Like the last stone which starts an avalanche, a process of change began which has not ended and whose future no one can yet foresee.

Each fresh incursion of race or idea had found the Indian temperament more malleable than before. This in a way accounts for India's capacity to hold in one synthesis diverse creeds, customs and outlooks. The impact of the West, however, differed in certain important respects from all previous incursions. Till the advent of the West, new ideas and institutions had been brought by people who came to settle here. They were opposed to many elements in what they found, but the weight of numbers and the inertia of age-long custom bore them down. They were responsible for minor changes but the total effect remained unchanged and in time they lost themselves in the ocean of Indian humanity. Moslems were the only people who succeeded in resisting such submergence. Even in their case, the stamp of Indian culture differentiated them from the rest of the world of Islam. It is true that they also influenced the Hindu modes of life, but their primary influence was confined to urban areas. Life in the Indian villages flowed along the ancient channels with hardly any change.

The impact of Europe brought into being an entirely different set of conditions. Europeans who came to India had no intention of settling here. Some of them were for a time dazzled by the splendour of Indian civilization, but soon they insulated themselves against its influence. They remained alien by deliberate choice and built up their life in accordance with the pattern of their own land. For the first time, therefore, India

faced a civilization which remained aloof and distant; it wanted neither to influence nor to be influenced. It was as if two closed systems faced one another upon the Indian soil. Absence of relation is, however, itself a kind of relation. The aloofness of the western people could not be absolute.

Interaction between the West and India was, therefore, inevitable, but it was at first an interaction mainly on the material plane. There were few, if any, contacts except in the field of trade and commerce. Goods were interchanged but not the concept of the good. Such a state, however, cannot continue long. Man is an economic animal, but he is also something more. Contacts which start through material interests develop into human relations. This soon happened with the Europeans who came to India. Historical accidents also helped the process. Through a strange irony of fate, men who had come for the lure of trade remained to rule the land. Political relations impinged upon economic contacts. The human aspect cannot altogether be denied even in relations that are purely economic. When economic contacts are strengthened by political ties, intercourse can no longer be confined to the material plane.

India was just emerging from the stage of rural economy when expanding trade brought Europe to her shores. The family was still the centre of her life. Even today our social reactions operate

mainly on the plane of the individual or the family. Individually Indians are one of the cleanest people in the world and yet our ideas of social cleanliness are lamentable. Scrupulously clean in our persons, we hardly notice the dirt and filth in our surroundings. Into this world of ego-centric social feelings, the West burst in with its growing capitalism and the concomitant development of a complex social consciousness.

It was inevitable that there should be profound and far-reaching changes in Indian modes of life. In fact, a silent unplanned revolution has been taking place in Indian society for the last two hundred years. Destruction of old sanctions has been followed by the repudiation of old values. The structure of society has itself changed. Social groups which were dominant in the 18th century are today found reduced to the ranks of social pariahs. One significant example will prove the extent of the change. Before 1774, Moslems were economically, politically and educationally the dominating community of Bengal. Sir William Hunter went so far as to say that it was then impossible for a Moslem of good family to be poor or unemployed. All this was changed in the course of barely seventy years. Warren Hastings' policy of replacing Moslem Revenue officers by Hindus started a process of impoverishment which was accelerated by the Permanent Settlement and the Resumption Proceedings. Macaulay's educational circular completed the change. Again according to Sir William Hunter, it became almost impossible

thereafter for a Moslem of good family to enjoy employment or wealth.

Changes were not confined to any one community or any one aspect of life. All old values and beliefs were being challenged. Old forms of faith and custom were crumbling. Social, economic and political institutions were breaking at a terrifying pace. India was literally in the melting pot. The old social stratification was disturbed. New types emerged which have no parallel in any previous period. To the plethora of Indian faiths was added the militant Christianity of the western world. Bands of Christian missionaries not only proselytised but sought to influence where they could not convert. The restless European spirit brought everything under its scrutiny. On the one hand the material conditions of life were changed. On the other, the buttresses of tradition and faith were undermined.

The process of revolutionary change was further hastened by man's increasing control over the forces of nature. It is perhaps the most significant fact in the history of the last one hundred years. Medieval India had tried to reconcile the elements contributed by different cultures and civilizations. New religions and philosophies which appeared from the fifteenth century onward are indication of such attempts at rapprochement. Hindu social forms are less rigid in the north than in the south. This is a measure of the extent of Moslem influence. The attitude towards caste is

the most prominent aspect of the difference. In spite of all attempts the process of reconciliation was however never complete. The fact of distance and inaccessibility co-operated with the inherent rigidity of social forms to prevent a complete and uniform synthesis.

When the material and religious influence of the European impact began to make itself felt, things were otherwise. Revolutionary changes had taken place in the means of social intercourse. Different sections and areas were increasingly knit together. Both geographically and culturally a process of compression had begun. Interchange between the different types became more frequent and intense. In the past, men had changed their creed without changing their way of life. Now a process began by which men changed their way of life without changing their creed. This explains why the extent of Christian influence upon contemporary India is out of all proportion to the number of Christians in India.

The advent of Islam with its characteristic world outlook influenced mainly the Hindu aristocrats and town dwellers. They determined the tendency if not the tone of the social whole. Partially counteracted by the vast distances of the country and the general immobility of the people, the impact of Islam had yet disturbed their inertia. When Christianity came, men were more willing and ready to accept its influence. The conquest of space and time through improved means of com-

munication and intercourse minimised, if it did not solve, the problem of distance and immobility. The changes which the western modes of thought initiated did not stop in the towns. It filtered into the villages in ever widening circles of influence. A new leaven had begun to work.

If India had faced the challenge of the West as a free and independent land, the course of human history for the last two centuries would have been entirely different. Free and independent India would have judged western culture on its merits and accepted or rejected at will elements in it. A process of synthesis would have begun for building up the future civilisation of the world by combining their most valuable elements. History, however, decided otherwise. Political subjugation compelled India to accept not what was suited to her genius but what her foreign conquerors imposed. They harnessed India to their own economy and forced through changes without regard to Indian interests. The old traditional pattern of social, economic and political life was disturbed and at times destroyed. Nor was there any attempt to build up a new and integrated outlook which would combine the heritage of the past with new ingredients brought from the West. Nature cannot, however, permit a vacuum. Haphazard and fragmentary beliefs and habits took the place

of the old way of life. The old was destroyed beyond recall but the new remains still unborn.

2

THE BIFURCATION

THE decision to adopt western modes of education was in such a context momentous. The British took the decision for their own immediate political and commercial ends. Little did they realise that they were sowing the seeds of a revolution which has few parallels in history. Macaulay foresaw some of the consequences simply but even he could not grasp their total implications. He thought that it would lead to the heightening of the tone of Indian life and in time to the substitution of western for Indian standards. There were Indians who were dazzled by their first acquaintance with western thought. With Macaulay they believed that one shelf of English books was worth the accumulated wisdom of the entire orient. Neither Macaulay nor his contemporaries realised that this was not a simple case of imposition of a European mould on the Indian mind, but a revivification of the Indian spirit which would in time create new forms of thought valid for East and West alike.

A factor which helped the quick assimilation of western modes of thought was that they were not wholly alien to the Indian soil. The filtering of

Greek culture through Arabic and Persian channels had for almost eight centuries prepared the Indian mind. It was therefore peculiarly receptive to the same ideas when they were again presented in symbols of the West. Besides, the culture of the West was itself composite. There were the Hebraic and the Hellenic strands woven into an indissoluble fabric. The Hebraic had its affinities with the Arab tradition. Even the Hellenic heritage came to Europe through an Arab medium. The Arab also incorporated in his science and philosophy elements borrowed from ancient India, and in course of time passed them on to Europe. All these elements though in new and strange combinations, were brought back to India by Europe. Little wonder then that under the impact of western culture, revolutionary changes began in the Indian scene till all the old landmarks were swept away one by one.

The part played in this historical process by Christian educationists and missionaries cannot be ignored. The early missions contained men who dedicated themselves to the task of converting the people to Christianity. But more important than their religious influence was their influence upon the social mind of the age. They were the educators of youth. With the political and economic background sketched above, their message of western culture revolutionised the mentality of those who came into contact with them. Indiscriminate imitation and adoption of western habits led to excesses that were at times foolish and still

inevitable in the circumstances of the times. Every thing Indian was discarded and young enthusiasts sought to suppress the whole of their racial and cultural past.

The period of blind and indiscriminate imitation did not continue long. Reaction was implicit in the human situation itself. The triumphs of European civilisation at first overwhelmed the Indian mind. As soon as the first shock of surprise had worn off, old habits of mind reasserted themselves. An old and proud civilisation like that of India could not be swamped or obliterated so easily. Clashes and conflicts between the different European nations helped in destroying the illusion of European superiority. Besides, closer acquaintances discovered many defects in European culture. Greater knowledge showed the existence of glaring social and political ills. Finer spirits from the West interpreted the culture of the East. Indian imitators of the West were confronted by European admirers of the East. Standards and values of East and West were compared in a more objective spirit. Historical research helped to restore balance and sanity by discovering the indentity of the human mind in diverse surroundings. The first uncritical adoration of the West was followed by a mood of critical appraisal.

The infantile enthusiasm for all things European disappeared in course of time, but not till it had done one great damage to the Indian social fabric. The challenge to the old ideals was no loss but a

definite gain. It compelled Indians to consider old problems anew and examine old truths in the light of new data. Unfortunately for India, the revaluation was at the cost of social unity. India's old culture had undergone transformation in the past as well, but they were marked by gradualness and homogeneity. The whole society had slowly evolved with changing times. The impact of Europe on the other hand led to a disruption of the social whole. A small minority responded enthusiastically to the new challenge. In fact it went so far as to seek to build up a new Europe on Indian soil. It discarded Indian traditions and sought inspiration in western ideals. The vast majority of Indians on the other hand clung to the past and remained almost impervious to the new civilisation.

The educational revolution brought about by Macaulay was largely responsible for this bifurcation of Indian society. The western modes of education were super-imposed on the country without any consideration of India's indigenous system or its needs. India had developed her own system of education in the course of centuries. It was attuned to her rural economy. It met the demands of her commerce and industry. It also served the needs of Indian administration and governance. Judged by prevalent standards, it was as progressive as education anywhere else. The British, however, desired a system of education that would serve best their purpose of exploiting India's resources. The old system of educa-

tion did not pass this test, for what suited India did not suit her new and impatient conquerors.

It was the lure of trade that brought Britain to India. Even after the assumption of authority, trade remained for long the first British interest. Administration was long conducted with a view to commercial advantage. For full exploitation of the country's resources, Britain needed a group of middlemen who could act as interpreters between her and the Indian people. The needs of administration also posed the same problem. Higher policy could be determined by the British themselves, but its application to the daily routine of administration required the service of indigenous men. The result was the creation of a large ministerial class who helped the British in administration and commerce. The primary qualification for such subordinates was proficiency in the English language. Education was therefore remodelled to suit the needs of the rulers. Instead of development of human personality, the chief aim of education became the attainment of linguistic proficiency in English.

It was inevitable that this new emphasis on linguistic efficiency should lead to a lowering of educational ideals. There was no organised system of a technical education in medieval India. Even what little was taught through guilds or through apprenticeship now disappeared. Besides, the steady suppression of Indian industry and trade destroyed the incentive to technical

education. Education became more and more literary and slowly Indians lost their manipulative skill. Increasing emphasis on mere literacy also cut education adrift from the existing economy of the land. Skill in English was hardly necessary for agricultural or commercial purposes. On the other hand, such skill provided easy and soft jobs in Government or business concerns. The result is that agriculture, India's largest industry, is to this day manned by people who are hardly lettered. When an agriculturist takes to education, it is invariably as a preliminary to abandonment of agriculture. Literate agriculturists are unknown and agriculturists who become literate soon cease to be agriculturists. This divorce of education from the country's economy has resulted in increasing impoverishment. What is worse, it has introduced a new and dangerous division into Indian society. The problems of communal and provincial jealousy are in themselves serious enough. Still more serious is the problem of the widening gulf that today divides the educated from the uneducated classes in India. It would perhaps be more accurate to speak of the lettered and the unlettered classes than of the educated and the uneducated. We have already seen that India evolved a culture of the people which was relatively free of mere literacy. If this was true in the days when education was attuned to the life of the country, it is far truer today when education

is divorced from the realities of Indian life and geared to serve the interests of a foreign exploiting economy. The divorce of modern education from the Indian context is however a fact which spells danger and perhaps disaster to the country's life.

The new literate classes largely derive their ideas from the West. They also derive their living from the British connection. Commerce may still promise glittering prizes, but the prizes are few and the competitors many. Service on the other hand promises security and sustenance. Compared to the sub-human standards which obtain all round, men in service enjoy relative comfort if not luxury. Their preferential position depends not on character or innate ability, but on superior linguistic skill. Such skill can however be easily acquired. Literacy in English has continually expanded in the course of the last century and led to an inordinate expansion of the middle classes. Some of the consequences of this disproportion of the middle classes are discussed later. One unwelcome feature however deserves special notice. The expansion of the middle classes meant more competitors for a limited number of jobs. Jobs could not keep pace with the increase in the numbers of the lettered. A good deal of the communal, provincial and linguistic jealousies in contemporary India may be traced to this disparity between the numbers of the literate and the avenues of livelihood, open to them.

Of even greater danger in the long run is the weaning away of the literate classes from the culture of the country. Literacy generally leads to urbanisation and urbanisation means a break from the past. The rural peasantry and the urban intelligentia tend to drift further from one another. Free flow between town and country has been disturbed. Today there is one way traffic leading to impoverishment of the village and no corresponding enrichment of the town. Loss of contact is leading to loss of communication. The unlettered villager and the lettered townsman hardly speak the same language today.

The new literates no longer derive their strength from the age-long traditions of the land. Their outlook is western or more frequently pseudo-western. Cut off from their moorings, they are unstable, loud and factional. A deep sense of community has in the past characterised Indian life. This explains in part how India weathered so many natural and human storms. The rural masses, especially the peasantry, exhibit today something of that sense of community life. They are unlettered, ignorant and superstitious, but their very immobility has in it an element of granite strength. Such qualities make for endurance but not for progress.

Thus we have on the one hand the masses that lack the power of initiative or expression but are possessed of a primeval strength derived from the soil. We have on the other hand an intellegentia

that is restless eager and inquisitive. Like flotsam it floats on the surface of Indian life but has no roots in the life of the people. It yearns for progress but lacks the inner strength which can carry through great changes. Community between the masses and the intellegentia would enable each to compensate its weakness by the other's strength. Instead of strengthening, the modern system of education tends to break the bond of that community.

3

GEOGRAPHICAL NATIONALITY

THE impact of British capitalism brought with it an emphasis upon national consciousness. The first Europeans who came to India were eager to meet Indians on human terms. Soon this was replaced by a mutual aloofness that sundered all bonds of intercourse. In spite of physical contiguity, the two people are today separated by a vast mental distance. The nearer England came with improvement in the means of communication, the more the Englishmen drew away from things Indian. The more the British withdrew into themselves, the more marked became their separateness from the people of the country.

The earlier Europeans were eager to become Indians and some Indians were carried away by

enthusiasm for everything British. After the British settled down into a separate caste, their separateness provoked reaction in the country. The legend of the solitary Englishman dressing for dinner was met by the myth of the inscrutable Indian who defied the bonds of flesh. The spiritual Indian was opposed to the material Englishman. The more the British emphasised their own nationality, the stronger grew the sense of nationality among Indians.

Emphasis upon the uniqueness of British nationality and culture necessarily provoked a consciousness of Indian nationality. Though the economic implications of political subjugation were not always realised, a spirit of intense patriotism developed. From the former repudiation of everything Indian, the reaction led to a blind adoration of the past. Indian renascence was often lost in mere revivalism. Nationalism served as a pretext for reviving old superstitions. Even today, we have not fully passed that stage. The curious amalgam of politics, religion and social superstitions that at times shocks scientific students may be attributed to this perverted nationalism. The idea of nationalism was borrowed from the West, and yet its development inevitably led to the repudiation of all things western. Western ideas had formerly served as the foci of new lines of development. They are now rejected simply because they derive from

the West. Attention is often diverted from essentials and concentrated upon trivial externals that hardly matter.

Paradoxical as it may sound, capitalism with its political expression in imperial domination exaggerates the importance of nationality. Capitalism is based on the private ownership of the instruments of production. Private ownership leads to production for profit instead of production for use. The larger the scale of production the greater the room for profit. The logical sequel to the process of large scale production is a tendency to world monopoly. The essence of modern capitalism lies in the capture and exploitation of foreign markets. The profits of such world wide exploitation are however confined primarily to the possessing class. To divert the attention of the dispossessed among their own people, they exalt the idea of national unity. This has led to the growth of an exaggerated nationalism among the European peoples. It conceals internal conflicts and maintains a facade of unity before the foreigner. The British have exploited national feeling with resounding success. Their attempt to apply it in the Indian context has led to startling developments.

A trend towards unity has throughout the ages governed Indian history. In the ancient period it led to the synthesis of diverse peoples and cultures in a hierarchical system. A unity of outlook

developed which transcended racial and provincial barriers. The urge towards political unification also made itself felt, but it was counteracted by the vastness of the country and the absence of adequate means of communication. The lack of opportunity for intercourse fitted with the predominantly agricultural economy of the day. Together, they encouraged the growth of local autonomy and the Indian system of village republic has never been equalled. The unity of India therefore expressed itself through language and literature, custom and religion, art and philosophy, but could find no stable political medium.

The Middle Ages repeat the story with minor variations. Attempts at political unification continue. The old hierarchy of caste is slowly replaced by a new economic order. Social habits are profoundly changed. New experiments in art establish new modes of unity. Language, custom and dress change through the influence of new forces. Rival systems of religion and philosophy achieve new synthesis. A new leaven works throughout India and introduces a new consciousness among its peoples. The movement towards unity however remains incomplete. A composite culture is created but it does not transform the core of Indian life. Diverse elements are held together but not merged.

We have already seen that India's geography was a most powerful factor for unity. Nature

had marked out the land to be one. Her whole history has been an unfulfilled endeavour to achieve that end. Whenever political unification was achieved, the country was at peace with itself and the world. Attempts to divide the country into separate sovereign States have invariably failed. Equally doomed to failure has been the attempt to extend the frontiers beyond her natural boundaries. Indian history has, therefore, oscillated between two extremes. One limit was marked by the fragmentation of the land into many States. The other by attempts to expand beyond India's natural frontiers. Equilibrium has been achieved only when the forces of history and geography worked in unison.

In the past this balance could not be maintained. Lack of communications meant lack of control. With the imperfect methods of intercourse, it was impossible to maintain contact over so vast an area. Today all this has changed with our increasing control over the forces of nature. Railways opened out the country and brought the outlying areas closer to one another. The country was ringed in an iron hoop. Motor cars pushed the process still further and today, aeroplanes have solved the problem of distance within India. The post, the telegraph and the telephone have performed the same function in a different way.

For the first time in Indian history, conditions today exist for a stable political unity. This is

not due to British occupation of India. The British would have fared like former rulers but for the new-found control over the forces of nature. This enabled them to maintain contact with their motherland and aloofness from the people of India. As England drew nearer in time and distance, the Englishman felt less need of human contact with the Indian. Simultaneously it enabled him to build and develop a centralised State. The extent of the King's reach measured the extent of King's power in former days. In modern times, the State can reach out to areas beyond an Alexander's dreams. And not only reach out, but keep constant touch and control. Modern scientific developments and the improvements in the means of communication make the organisation of India as one State not only feasible but necessary. The sentiment of unity can today find a political embodiment. It is not accidental that Indian national consciousness is a recent growth.

The idea of geographical nationality is therefore largely a recent development. Indians rarely before thought of themselves in terms of nationhood. There was a loose and tenuous unity of culture, but no unity of political organisation. The vastness of the country and absence of modern methods of communication worked against political unification. Equally important was the absence of any sense of nationality in its modern meaning. Capitalism and the nation-state have developed side by side. It is another

way of recording the fact that capitalism is for India still a development of the future.

The idea of nationality has profoundly affected the Indian consciousness. This disturbance is most pronounced in the minds of the younger generation and specially the students. They receive the impact of new ideas directly. Their mental resilience enables them to react to every influence brought to bear upon them. They are relatively free from the stabilising influence of vested interests. As students, they have not yet been fitted into the social framework in any specific form. They read of the glories of the western nation-state. It seems to them that the triumph of the West is due to its acceptance of the principle of nationalism. Infinite possibilities seem to open before them once India becomes a nation-state.

Western thought has also had an influence in increasing the emphasis upon democracy. It would be wrong to say that democracy was unknown to India. In the early village republic, India found a type of democracy which has rarely been excelled. Even the hierarchy of caste was originally an instrument of democracy. By emphasising function, it enabled an individual to rise in the social-scale. This was however changed when birth, and not function became the basis of caste. Before the advent of Islam, Buddism made the first serious attack on the citadel of caste. It did not fully succeed but left

its mark on the Hindu social system. Changes occurred everywhere but the most far reaching and persistent effects were felt in north-eastern India.

Islam's democratic challenge has perhaps never been equalled by any other religious or social system. Its advent on the Indian scene was marked by a profound stirring of consciousness. It modified the basis of Hindu social structure throughout northern India. In north-eastern India, its success was phenomenal. One cannot escape the conclusion that the earlier impact of Buddism was one of the factors which contributed to its overwhelming victory in the north-eastern regions of India.

And yet democracy could not be a force in India's political life. The Indian intellect delights in the abstract and the universal. The individual hardly exists for it. This capacity to submerge the particular in the general is manifest in Indian religion, art and philosophy. Indian religions tolerate social inequity. The individual is but a fleeting embodiment of the Absolute and the Absolute can suffer neither indignity nor wrong. In Indian painting, we come across *the tree,* but rarely across a particular tree with an individual physiognomy and shape. Even human beings are stylicised and stereotyped. In Indian philosophy, the particular has value only as a function of the universal. In a word, the Indian intellect

emphasised the type and tended to ignore the individual.

This indifference to the brute particular also explains why India missed the scientific temper and attitude. India threw up many individuals of great genius and they discovered important truths. There are brilliant anticipations of modern scientific theory but there was no science in the modern sense. Indifference to the individual prevented the growth of Indian science. Democracy is however nothing if not a recognition of the value of the individual. In India, democracy therefore worked within strictly defined limits. It could function in the village where personal relations softened the sharpness of abstract thought. Outside the range of immediate and intimate contacts, it remained a mere idea.

The vastness of the country accommodated village democracy alongside autocratic imperialism. There was a good deal of local freedom, but it was tolerated rather than recognised. Whenever it came to a clash, compact military power triumphed over unorganised public opinion. The European emphasis on institutional democracy therefore brought something new to the Indian consciousness. What was also new was the increase in control over the forces of nature. Its most visible symbol was the improvement in the means of communication. The spirit of democracy now found a proper vehicle. At first through rail-

ways, and later through the country bus, equality invaded the country side.

4

THE CONFLICT

INDIAN nationalism swayed uncertainly between western modes of life and the old and superseded social forms. The uncertainty affected the mentality of the age. The disturbance was naturally greatest among the young. The process did not, however, stop here, for the world was passing beyond the stage of nationalism. India was forced to experience simultaneously the stages through which European culture had successively passed. We have referred to the abortive capitalism of India. Her nationalism and democracy were threatened with the same arrested development. Before she had fully evolved her nationality or her democracy, she was faced with the problem of organising her life in terms of social collectivism.

The development of capitalism led to world monopoly. Monopoly raised questions about the distribution of its profits among the various members of society. A primitive rural economy can be centred round the family or the tribe. The father tills and the mother weaves and cooks. Children help in the field or house. Each family reproduces society in miniature. With growing specialisation and increasing skill in different

types of work, the tribe or village takes the place of the family, but the life of the tribe or village still remains self-contained. It is only when trade and commerce develop that social interdependence becomes sufficiently strong to colour communal psychology.

The first European war shook the basis of existing culture. It revealed the contradictions inherent in nationality and capitalism in a naked form. New ideas captured the imagination of the intellectually alert. The profound disturbance in man's accepted beliefs and habits were climaxed in the socialist revolution of Russia. It is yet too early to assess its repercussions on the various forms of social life. The challenge to private property and the profit motive is however too great to be ignored by any type of society. The capitalist urge towards monopoly was brought to its logical conclusion. The purpose of the monopoly was however transformed from that of private benefit to social service.

The first world war has disillusioned young men all over the world about the possibilities of capitalism. The threat of unemployment and starvation is a strong reminder of the failure of the existing system. In India, it is not even full-fledged capitalism but a hybrid system under which the middle classes continually grow. They expand, but without assurance of either prosperity or security. Students who derive mainly from the

middle classes are haunted by the spectre of unemployment throughout their student life.

The middle classes have everywhere started to realise that they have no future. In India, their plight is still more pitiable. The growth of capitalism has in other countries secured them a place in the social economy. In India, the expansion of indigenous capitalism was resisted by the British through political and economic pressure. And yet, the relative comforts of the middle class continually attract recruits from other strata of society. A middle class has developed which is too numerous for support by the existing economy. Its members refuse to go back to a lower level of economic competence. And yet their march forward to capitalism is hampered in a thousand ways. Unemployment has increased and also discontent.

The sense of frustration so often exhibited by Indian young men is a direct outcome of this state of affairs. Socialism with its ideas of social justice and equality of opportunity challenges their endeavour and their faith. The context in which they have to work and live seems far removed from the realisation of such changed social order. The conflict between their aspirations and their surroundings provoke in the majority despondence and light hearted flippancy. It is only in a minority that it challenges determined effort and striving. In the complex and often inchoate

mentality of the young Indians of today, the three elements which cause the greatest ferment are the ideas of nationality and socialism and a sense of frustration and purposelessness.

The seeds of discontent and unrest spread far and wide and fell on congenial soil. This process was however disguised for a time. In the early stages, western education brought with it a guarantee of material success. The first reaction was one of uncritical adulation, but the phase of uncritical adoration could not and did not last long. The first flush of admiration wore away and simultaneously the pressure of economic forces became insistent. Western education could guarantee material prosperity only so long as its votaries were sufficiently few to be absorbed in the economic system of the time. With increase in their numbers, a change in the economic order became imperative and yet the obstacles to any change were almost insuperable. The silent destruction of India's industrial life had long escaped attention but it could no longer be ignored. The increase in the numbers of the educated unemployed and the constant growth in the pressure on the soil were only symptoms of the growing malady.

The growing impoverishment of the country accompanied a demand for a better standard of life. It may sound paradoxical but its historical reasons are not far to seek. European capitalism

had already started on its triumphant career when it came into close contact with India. How the Indian market provoked the growth of that capitalism and sustained it is a story into which we need not enter here. Nor is this the occasion to trace the repercussions between political and economic forces. The operation of the same economic laws which brought England on the Indian scene led in their natural working to the political subjugation of India.

The immature and undeveloped industries of India faced the vigorous and hungry capitalism of the West. Indian industries were destroyed and the country forced back to the rural economy from which it was seeking to emerge. The reversion to an agricultural way of life coupled with enforced peace increased existing difficulties and created new problems. The population increased but the country was denuded of its wealth. Land can never provide for the whole population adequately, except in societies that are still primitive in organisation. In India, the clock of civilisation was put back. At the same time, contact with the West revealed to the people a panorama of immense possibilities. The higher standard of material civilisation achieved by the West served as a challenge and an irritant. The growing impoverishment of the land added an element of bitterness to those who came into contact with it. Better means of communication and the dehabilita-

tion of the old social order made this discontent deep and widespread. A new spirit of unrest and inquiry permeated the country and the people.

Western ideas and the growing impoverishment of the country are two factors which sowed the seeds of discontent in the Indian mind. The increased facilities of intercourse and communication assured that the discontent would be deep and wide. The enforced arrest in development of the Indian economic system further aggravated the situation. The break up of Moghul feudalism would, in normal circumstances, have led to the evolution of Indian capitalism. British capitalism served as a progressive force so far as it helped to destroy the prevailing order. It ceased to be progressive when it resisted, as in its own interest it was bound to, the free development of capitalism in India. The compromise through which it effected its purpose was the creation of an extremely strong middle class. It intended that this bourgeoisie should help in the distribution of British goods over the whole of India and still remain content with a mere fraction of the profits earned by British capital. This the new bourgeoisie soon refused to do. It demanded not only a larger share in the profits but also a share in British political and cultural heritage. Drawn from an ever-widening sphere, it not only circulated goods but also ideas. In time its mentality became the dominant factor in Indian social life.

5

ETERNAL VERSUS MOMENTARY

THE unbalanced growth of the middle classes is perhaps the most significant fact of modern India. Middle classes all over the world are restless, critical and individualistic. From the nature of the case, they are economically unstable. Impelled by the urge to move upward into the ranks of the capitalists, many of them are yet fated to relapse into the ranks of the proletariat. They have to maintain a standard of respectability which is often beyond their means. This constant economic struggle colours their whole outlook on life. The aristocrat is so sure of his own standing that he feels no need to assert it. The proletariat also is apt to accept his lot. The middle classes refuse to be content and are often aggressive, self-assertive and loud. They justify themselves by criticising others.

This attitude of criticism in the middle classes extends not only to other groups or classes but also to themselves. For one thing, the middle classes can never be a homogeneous group. No social class is fully homogeneous, but stratification is more marked in the case of the middle classes. At one extreme are those who just escape being proletariats. At the other are those who are hardly distinguishable from capitalists. Nowhere therefore is social snobbery so rampant as among

the middle classes. Every one is afraid and jealous of every one else. Individualism runs to excess and threatens to become a disease. The enlargement of the middle classes is, therefore, always a signal for the disintegration of the old social order.

The influence of the West has also in other ways accelerated the process of social change in India. The results have been at times paradoxical. The European social system with its divergence from Indian modes shook people's faith in the inevitability of any particular system. Repeated incursions of new races into India have compelled continual adjustments from the earliest times. The adaptive tendencies were however opposed by conservative forces. Threatened by war and at times alien forces, society grew a crust of orthodoxy as a measure of defence. The demands of a changed situation were opposed by a blind adherence to the past. Social progress and social inertia often worked at cross purposes. The lack of adequate communications weighted the scale in favour of conservatism, but with the improvement in the means of intercourse, the tendency towards change and progress was accelerated. This helped not only in the circulation of goods, but also in that of ideas. Towns were brought nearer the villages. Urban areas are always centres of non-conformity, scepticism and experiment. Villages are comparatively placid, credulous and orthodox. The impact of the towns on the villages has

shaken the complacence of traditional modes of life.

The increasing intensity of the economic struggle has also helped to disturb the mood of contented acceptance. The old and easy ways of life are gone. Hereditary occupations can no longer guarantee the individual sustenance or comfort. New types of employment attract men from all communities and castes. The impersonality of the town has made intercourse between different groups easier. We are today witnessing a silent revolution taking place before our very eyes. Old moral ideas are changing beyond recognition. Caste—often regarded as the bed-rock of Hindu society—is itself breaking down. The old economic standards are gone. Changes in the material conditions of existence are bringing about profound changes in the mental outlook as well.

The impact of Europe has also forced upon us a new view of life and conduct. European modes of thought have been predominantly experimental. This has been in direct conflict with prevailing modes of thought in India. The worldly and pragmatic aspects of Hindu thought faded long ago. Even Islam has lost its militant rationalism in the Indian setting. European science concerns itself with phenomena. It has sought to measure, understand and control what can be observed. The transcendental has been denied or ignored.

India's concern with the eternal has thus been confronted with England's preoccupation with the

momentary. India has ignored the present. Britain often neglects the future. For the Englishman, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. He has neither the mind nor the time to think of future misery. The Indian on the other hand tries to think beforehand of all contingencies. In his anxiety to avoid future risks, he often lets present opportunity slip. India boasts of her clear and logical foresight. Britain takes pride in her capacity to muddle through. India's indifference to present misery in the hope of future reward has found in the British attitude its direct antithesis. The triumph of the worldly and experimental attitude of the British has made Indians question and re-examine the trend and basis of their own thought.

The social flexibility which is beginning to be evident on all sides is one expression of a growing empirical outlook. This was precisely what India lacked at the time of Europe's advent. A rigid dogmatism had taken the place of easy adaptation to changing circumstances. Adaptation is the law of life and can be resisted only at peril of death. Loss of adaptability meant the loss of power to survive. Indian society under the later Moghuls was therefore threatened with internal dessication. The victory of Europe was only an outward symbol of inner decay. Impact of European modes shattered the old rigidity and compelled a revaluation of old standards. European ideals were very different and could not yet be lightly dismissed in view of their dazzling triumph. The

clash of ideals engendered an attitude of enquiry and criticism, though its objectives are yet uncertain and indefinite.

Questions are the cutting edge of knowledge. Without enquiry there can be no growth. Questions and enquiry are therefore essentially the mark of youth. The restoration of a critical spirit has thus meant a rejuvenation of India. Rejuvenation has its attendant dangers. Adolescence tends to deny everything it finds. It dreams of shaping the world anew. It does not discriminate between what to preserve and what to reject of its social heritage. Its criticism is often directed at the external while the fundamental weakness remains untouched. Rejuvenation may exhibit adolescent characteristics in an even more marked degree.

If the ferment in Indian life is not to degenerate into mere anarchy, our problems must be approached in a spirit of calm and searching analysis. Reason alone can build a heritage for the delight and pride of future generations out of the crumbling ruins of the Indian past. The role of reason is the more important because of extraneous factors that have intervened. Consciousness of political subjugation has made our people peculiarly susceptible to offence. Misinterpretation of Indian history has created misunderstanding and bitterness among the communities. Criticism which is perfectly justified is often resented because of the source from which it emanates. The confusion of renascence and revivalism further

complicates the picture. Communalism and extreme radicalism are blended to charge the atmosphere with passion and prejudice.

Blind rejection of the West is today the prevalent temper of Indian society. This was a natural reaction from its blind imitation in the past. The denial of a wrong is not however equivalent to the assertion of the right. Blind and indiscriminate denial of the West would harm India more than the West. Values of great importance to India stand in danger of being unnecessarily sacrificed. If this tendency holds, India may again be dissociated from the general current of the civilisation of the world. Dissociation means isolation and isolation stagnation. India can attempt dissociation from the world currents only at her peril.

Nor would such attempt at putting the clock back succeed. In the modern world of interlacing connections, isolation is impossible. Attempted isolation will only lead to economic and political disaster. Instead of being a conscious and active participant in world processes, India would then become a buffet of forces over which she would have no control. It is easy to understand the reluctance of the average Indian patriot to accept the values of the West. To him they must bring memories of cultural imperialism and national humiliation. To deny the superiority of the West where the West is in fact superior is however no remedy. Nor is it of any use to exalt Indian elements simply because they are Indian. In-

feriority complex often expresses itself through an exaggerated assertion of superiority. Acceptance of values wherever found and their absorption in the national heritage is the surest sign of national health and sanity.

6

ART AND LITERATURE

MODERN India looked at the West through English spectacles. It is therefore English thought which has primarily influenced us, or at most, western thought so far as it has been assimilated and transmitted by the British. It is often said that the greatest gift of England to India has been English language and literature. That this is largely true cannot be denied. British influence on our dress, habits and social customs has been small. The changes wrought in our intellectual and spiritual make-up have on the other hand been far-reaching.

It is true that the English language has given us some access to other European literatures. But we have so emphasised the importance of English that we tend to underrate everything else. Other European literatures have their own characteristics. They do not easily fall into English moulds. Our efforts to apply to them English tests therefore fail. We even try to look at Eastern literatures with English eyes. The results

are both pathetic and grotesque. We forget that we can never become fully English in our thought, sentiment and outlook. At best we can only become imitation Englishmen and imitators are debarred from citizenship of the world.

One peculiarity of the British influence may be noted here. The British are in their social habits and personal relations one of the most reserved peoples of the world. The cool phlegmatic Englishman has become proverbial. Caution and restraint characterise the personal and social life of Englishmen. Emotions are held in leash and even suppressed. Napoleon saw in them a nation of shopkeepers who weighed out things with minute scales. This is however a one-sided picture, for the repressed emotions force an outlet in their art. Passion leaps to fantastic heights and makes English poetry one of the most intense in the world.

This peculiarity of British character and art has at times led us to a misunderstanding of literary values. Human emotion is only one of the ingredients of literature and not its end. The reticence which characterises literature in the Latin languages is rare in English. This has also influenced our reaction to peoples other than the British. We seek to judge the heartiness of Americans by British standards of social propriety. We expect in French rationalism or Chinese economy the emotional exuberance found in English poetry.

Development of indigenous literatures began even before the advent of the British. Bengalee poetry had reached considerable maturity under the Pathans and the Moghuls. The devotional poetry of Maharashtra is of lasting value and interest. Kabir and his followers reached great heights in experience and expression. The Ramayana of Tulsidas still remains a household book. What the British did was to release new social forces and precipitate a literature that is strange and novel.

The changes in the economic and social structure of the country helped in this process. We have seen how the old stratification was disturbed in Bengal. The expansion of the middle class carried with it an expansion in leisure. It created both a demand and an opportunity for art. The system of permanent land tenure brought into being a middle class which continually grew. Economically it ruined Bengal by discouraging initiative and diverting capital from commerce and industry into land. Socially it created a system of vested interests which blocked the progress of the country as a whole. Politically it acted as a buffer which stood between the impoverished people and an exploiting imperialism. In the field of art alone did it prove fruitful and creative. Bengal's expanded middle classes threw up a series of literary men unequalled in modern India and culminating in a world figure like Tagore.

The excitement of acquaintance with English poetry helped in the flowering of Bengalee literature. Yet it would be too much to say that this excitement by itself was responsible for the new renascence. The soil was prepared by the economic, social and political changes brought about by the invasion of European capitalism. It was only in this background that the influence of English poetry proved decisive. We have referred to the intensity of English aesthetic experience and expression. English poetry is marked, not by balance and reticence which make for decorum and social order but by an emphasis upon individual feeling and emotion. The rugged individualism of the Englishman has been noted in other fields as well. Each Englishman thinks of his home as his castle over which he claims absolute sway. This individualism is characteristic of the middle-class and British civilisation has been typically bourgeois.

Indian society was disintergrating through the expansion of the middle class. A new desire for liberty and a sense of revolt against authority stirred the younger generations. A new note of individualism, revolt and scepticism was dicernible in the national character. The temper of English poetry with its emphasis on individual liberty was therefore in sympathy with its spirit. Nowhere was the new ferment so strong and extensive as in Bengal. The poetry of Bengal since the advent of the British is marked by a new note of individualism, revolt and scepticism.

The note of individualism continually deepens till the poet felt alone in an alien universe. The pathos and solitariness which characterise much of the poetry of Tagore is an expression of this spirit. The process continued and a stage was reached when the individual felt separate not only from other individuals but lost the unity of his own personality. This loss of integrity is not confined to Bengalee poetry alone but has its counterpart in most contemporary Indian art.

The emphasis upon the individual tends to loosen social bonds. Customs and traditions act as a cement which bind together the community. The condition for social integration is that the individual surrenders to the purposes of the social group. When the individual exalts himself above society, old social patterns begin to crumble. A curious reflex of this process of social disintegration is often seen in a sudden efflorescence of literature and art. All forms of art are the expression of individuality. The final condemnation of a work of art is to call it commonplace or general. A social millieu in which traditions are sacrificed to individuality therefore often creates the background for a flowering of art. It is not accidental that the enlargement of the middle classes in India has been accompanied by an outburst of experiment in many forms of art.

It is also significant that in all modern manifestations of Indian art, the one form which is absent is architecture. There has been no

notable architectural monument in contemporary India. Nor is this due to any deficiency in the Indian character. Past memorials testify to the feeling for beauty which informed the Indian mind. The complexity and intricacy of south Indian temples are matched by their solidity and grandeur. The wonderful lines of the Moghul mausoleums are the despair of architects all over the world. It is only in recent times that the Indian feeling for massive form has failed to find adequate or significant expression. The reason must be sought in the nature of architecture itself.

Of all forms of art, architecture is most dependent on a social feeling for beauty. The poet can launch into individual voyages after the ideal. The painter also may achieve perfection in isolation. Music may transcend the individual but has its origin in individual ecstasy. Architecture alone must depend on social factors at every stage. Only the co-operative endeavour of many can build up great architectural monuments. Not only the master builder but his associates must have a feeling for craftmanship. The whole of society must be informed by a sense of common purpose and endeavour. It is only when there has been a deep communal sense that great architectural monuments have been raised. The Gothic churches of Europe, the rock temples of south India or the great Mosques of the Saracens are all visible symbols of a unified

society at peace with itself. Whenever social solidarity has been sundered, architecture has been the first form of art to suffer.

7

THE YOUNG REBELS

A CHARACTERISTIC which compels attention in contemporary India is the attitude of defiance among the younger generations. This is not confined to any class, community or area. A tidal of rebelliousness has swept through the land and affected men and women in every sphere of life. The proverbial docility of the Indian peasant has either already disappeared or is disappearing fast. Indian labour now demands and often exacts a human standard of life and treatment. The Indian student has lost the tradition of submission and respectfulness. Women are clamouring for equal rights with men. In a word, the younger generations are on the march and recognise none of the sanctions or the privileges of the past.

To older generations and persons in power, this rejection of authority often appears as mere turbulence and indiscipline. It provokes regret and at times horrified anticipations of India's gloomy future. There is, however, no historical justification for the attitude of the older

generations. Old political ideas have crumbled. Old social standards have lost their compelling force. The old economic system has been shattered beyond repair. Even religion can no longer console as in the past. In every sphere of thought and action, there is uncertainty, doubt and hesitation. With old landmarks swept away, it is not surprising that Indian youth is restless and turbulent.

The perturbance of the older generation is not however strange or unexpected. They were brought up in a society based on the concept of authority. Status governed both political and economic relations and status was immutable as the order of nature itself. Even religion contributed to the maintenance of the *status quo* by its emphasis on revelation and sanction. Islam's revolutionary democracy shook that edifice of sanction and authority but could not demolish it. The emphasis on the finality of revelation encouraged authoritarianism within Islam itself. The conservative and authoritarian tendency was still more marked in Christianity. In a word, all the religions in India combined to buttress the authoritarian structure of society. Those who were brought up in such an atmosphere missed the silent and unobtrusive changes in their surroundings. It was only when the process was almost complete that they realised with a shock the difference between the old order and the new.

There was another reason for the passivity of the traditional Indian outlook. Imperialism is incompatible with the rejection of authority. In India the advent of a new religion was accompanied by the establishment of a new empire. In the earlier period, the rise and fall of Buddhism and Brahmanism fluctuated with the fortunes of rival imperial dynasties. In the Middle Ages the spread of Islam was accelerated by the establishment of Moslem power in Delhi. In more recent times, Christianity has followed in the wake of British domination of India.

When Islam or Christianity first came to India, neither had a trace of military power attached to it. They, however, became important only after the establishment of military domination by their followers. This fact had the unfortunate effect of confusing material and spiritual influences. The inner meaning of Islam was hidden by the political machinations of rival Moslem kings. Christianity tended to be identified with the morality of the British ruling classes. Religion thus became associated with an imperial regime and no imperial regime can tolerate the growth of a critical intellectual outlook. Education fashions the minds of men and determines the temper of both individuals and society. Both the imperial systems have therefore based education upon the idea of unquestioning acceptance and discouraged enquiry and criticism.

Recent years have seen a silent but profound alteration in this background. Scientific discoveries outmoded old method of production and distribution. The use of machinery compelled large scale production and demanded far-flung markets. A revolution in the methods of production was therefore followed by a revolution in the means of communication and intercourse. Religion and cultural tendencies acquired a new and expanded influence. As the interchange between town and country grew, the influence of the town continually increased. Towns on the whole have always been centres of ferment and change. Increase in the importance of towns therefore introduced a new dynamic in society. Intercourse through the railway, the post office and even more the printing press broke down social and religious barriers and further undermined the sway of authority.

Simultaneously, the growth of the middle-class brought with it the prevalence of a rebellious and anarchic mood. This also worked against the old traditions of authority. The people, specially the younger among them, grew more amenable to new and alien influences. Political and economic forces operated against one another and introduced a new disequilibrium. The new imperialism demanded an enlarged middle-class but would not yet permit the growth of indigenous capitalism. This fundamental contradiction expressed itself as the political discontent of an intellectually alert minority. Soon it

pervaded the whole of society as a spirit of unrest and rejection of old values.

The ebullience of spirit in contemporary India is therefore a symptom of the times. The historical forces which are shaping the destiny of India challenge the authoritarian basis of society and education. The first flush of intellectual emancipation leads to excesses in every sphere. Reactions are equally violent and oscillation between extremes still continues unchecked. It is inevitable that a transition from the attitude of mind based upon acceptance of authority to one based on reasoned equality should be marked by uncertainty, unrest and upheaval.

The transformation is the inevitable result of a long process of transitional changes. Nor are the changes sudden or accidental. A long period of sudden and unobtrusive preparations went on unnoticed. It came as a shock only to those whose mental and social habits had become ossified. We must not, however, exaggerate the extent of the change. Social habits are changing, but social beliefs are still largely unchanged. The attitude of criticism and intellectual examination is still extensive rather than intensive. Modern moods mingle strongly with anachronistic feelings. Contemporary Indians think, feel and act simultaneously in many periods. The past, the present and the future are telescoped in strange patterns that baffle analysis and understanding.

8

RENASCENCE AND REVIVALISM

THE confusion of nationalism with obscurantism in modern India has often attracted notice. A phenomenon still more curious is the amalgamation of doctrinaire socialism with sectarian communalism of an extreme type. The demand for social justice forms the basis of all socialist theories. In India this is abstracted from its own context and distorted to suit the purpose of vested interests who use communal passion to serve their own ends. The plea for communism no longer serves as a cementing bond to knit together the various sections of the exploited classes. Through intrusion of extraneous religious considerations, it becomes instead a guarantee for maintaining the iniquities of the existing social order.

Renascence and revivalism are therefore working at cross purposes in modern India. Traditional moorings have been destroyed. The former attitude of acceptance can no longer serve as basis of India's social life. The old security of life has been shattered. With it have gone the old and familiar ideals of life. The growing inter-lacing of world affairs renders all attempts at maintenance of isolation or equanimity futile. Men with whom we neither have nor can have any personal contact determine the courses of

our life. Decisions which have nothing to do with our hopes and demands decide between life and death for us. It is small wonder that there should be manifestations of unrest and even indiscipline.

Unrest and ferment are therefore characteristic of contemporary India. Her ancient people are on the march. Her ideals have not yet been defined but there are everywhere the stirrings of a new birth. Far reaching changes in the Indian scene have taken place throughout the ancient and the medieval periods. They did not however create the impression of the sundering of the old ties. Changes which have taken place during the last two centuries, and especially within the last three or four decades are however of an altogether different order. They seem almost unrelated to the past and bear all the marks of an entirely new beginning.

The impression of utter novelty is no doubt wrong. Present phases are the culmination of a process that began long ago and has persisted through centuries. Nevertheless the impression of break with the past cannot be denied. Nor is this peculiar to India alone. Changes which have occurred during the last three or four centuries have made a greater difference to human life and culture than the changes which occurred in the whole of previous recorded history. In fact, the pace of change has been accelerated at a terrifying rate.

The modern period has not only seen accelerated changes, it has also seen unification on a scale and degree never experienced before. There have been many civilisations before, but there has hardly ever been a world civilisation. Ancient Indian civilisation was primarily the concern of India. Roman civilisation was confined to the Mediterranean basin. Chinese civilisation had little influence outside its immediate orbit. In spite of its wider spread, even Arab civilisation was regional rather than terrestrial. In fact, the material conditions for a truly world civilsation did not exist. With the conquest of nature, conditions have for the first time been created for a civilisation that can function on a global scale.

The most notable feature of this global civilisation is the passion for social justice. It challenges the sway of exploitation and imperialism. It attacks social inequality and inequity at their very base. Its instrument of attack is the machine which liberates human energy and creates the possibility of leisure for every human individual. The enslavement of nature for the first time in history makes unnecessary the enslavement of man. All intellectually alert men and women dream of a new order of society. This new vision is the result of man's new found control over nature.

The control over the forces of nature have opened out vistas that were beyond man's wildest

dreams in former times. The poorest citizen today has at his command resources that were denied to the proudest potentates of the world. The common man can enjoy a standard of life which was beyond the reach of the most powerful of kings. Luxuries of former times have become the barest necessities of today. And all this can be achieved on a truly world scale. The extension in scope and opportunity holds not only within countries but between countries as well. What was formerly the prerogative of a small section in a particular country is today available for the whole of mankind all over the world.

Extension of civilisation is potentially world-wide today but so also is disaster to civilisation. Formerly, the decline of a civilisation meant the decline of a section within one country. There was the possibility that other sections in that country or at least in other countries would take up the torch of civilisation and maintain human progress. Through the increasing conquest of space and time, revolutionary changes in the methods of warfare and attack, transformation in the means and scale of production and distribution, and the growing integration of the social and economic life of different regions of the world, that possibility has today disappeared. One world is in the process of establishment if it has not already been established. Its fate is also therefore bound to be one. Like freedom and peace, progress for the world is also today indivisible.

Conflicts grow out of a sense of wrong. If the roots of conflict are not removed, the whole structure of world civilisation must come down with a crash. Two world wars in the course of twenty-five years are a sharp reminder of that danger. They have already shown how imperialism, in spite of frantic endeavour after compromise, cannot achieve a permanent equilibrium. Economic exploitation and the attendant sense of wrong are inherent in the nature of imperialism. They cannot be removed without the liquidation of imperialism itself. The ideals of justice and the need for survival combine in demanding a new orientation of society.

Indian independence is the first step towards such reorientation. Dependent India means not only servile India but sullen India. It means the failure to utilise her vast material and human resources. A stringent economy means a disturbed society. Indian society is today explosive because of the stringency of her economy. What appears on the surface as communal or provincial jealousy and discord are at bottom efforts to survive. India's industries have been destroyed. Indian agriculture cannot support her increasing population. Service alone seems to offer security and comfort. There is therefore an unhealthy competition in securing service as a means to survival. In the struggle for existence, every individual and group use the weapons readiest at hand. Vested interests can squeeze out luxury even out of the existing regime. A capitalist

whatever his race or colour can always command the good things of life. Communal cries serve to divert the attention of the exploited masses from glaring inequalities. Communalism is the last defence of vested interests.

Attention may be thus diverted from glaring evils but the problems are not solved. Communal passions rankle in the mind. Social ties are loosened. The order and decorum built up through centuries of effort and restraint are endangered. Civil society is like an embankment that contains the surging tide. So long as the embankment holds, the tides rage in vain. Once there is the slightest fissure, not only is the whole embankment threatened but also the countryside it protects. Similarly with the restraints built up by civilisation. Once they are loosened, the way of life they protect is in danger. What may start as a communal riot ends as civil strife. Civil strife soon develops into international war. With the modern weapons of destruction and death, international war presages the end of human civilisation itself.

The problem of Indian independence is therefore no longer a problem for India alone. The current of world events beats on India's shores. She is caught in the movement towards unity and integration and cannot escape her fate. Political subjugation however makes her more a passive object for world forces than an active agent on the world scene. This is instinct with danger to herself and the world. It is a threat to world

peace as her subjugation and exploitation tempt powers other than her exploiter. It is full of danger to herself as it prevents her full free and natural development. Suppressed and embittered, she is not only full of conflicts within herself but a source of infection to the world outside. A free and peaceful India would be a bastion for world peace. Not only would she stabilise and secure the ferment in the near East but also throw her powerful weight on the side of forces working for peace.

With her complex and continuous culture of many centuries, India has rich gifts to offer to the world. The impact of the West has awakened her from age-long slumber. A new spirit of youth breathes in her ancient limbs. New questions stir in the depth of her consciousness. The clash between the eastern and the western outlook provokes in her a new religious and social awakening. There are not only new quests for spiritual truth but also new relaxations of old social tyrannies. Throughout the nineteenth century, one reformer after another appeared on the Indian scene. Their influence has however remained on the surface and never penetrated to the depths of Indian life. The same story is repeated in the political and economic fields. The old patterns have been destroyed, but as yet there is no guarantee of a new and resplendent birth.

In the field of art alone has contemporary India built up memorials worthy of her past. Art is

however, essentially a quest of the individual in the solitariness of his spirit. Architecture or the theatre, where art is communal, remains unborn in modern India. Even in painting and poetry, the solitary spirit tires if it cannot continually replenish its energy from the depths of the racial mind. Indian poetry and painting flourish like the cactus on the shallow beds of earth on the hill-sides. They are brilliant but remain exotic and strike no roots in the people's soul.

The failure of India to attain her poise is most marked in the realms of philosophy. Philosophy examines the postulates of existing beliefs. It subjects to scrutiny the established bases of civilisation. In a word, it is man's criticism of the presupposition of his own faith. For philosophy to flourish there must be an established civilisation and culture. Where civilisation is in the process of disintegration and culture in the melting pot, it would be idle to expect philosophy to develop. The paucity of Indian philosophy in the last three or four centuries is evidence of the sterility of Indian culture and civilisation during that period.

There are however signs of a new birth on all sides. The ferment and unrest in all spheres of Indian life and thought are evidence that a new world is taking shape. Stars must collide and dissolve in gasseous neubulae before a new sun can be born. Ancient India was remarkable for its spirit of synthesis and reconciliation. The

modern world is instruct with the urge of a new and impatient life. To the old tradition of unity of life has been added the new demand of equality and justice. Old values and new must clash in India before a new humanity can emerge. This ancient arena of the world is again the battle-field of conflicting forces. Young men in India must play their part worthily in that process. They must preserve elements of value from the decaying civilisations of the past. They must formulate the new demands of the emerging world civilisation. Theirs is the task of achieving a new synthesis in which the heritage of the ancient, the medieval and the modern world will be reconciled and enriched.